THE NATURAL AND RURAL WORLD IN TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH POETRY

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Thesis submitted to the Council for National Academic Awards in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD, in December 1980. Research conducted at The Polytechnic, Wolverhampton.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the extensive help given to me by the Polytechnic, Wolverhampton during my initial two years as a salaried Research Assistant and during my subsequent time as a lecturer registered part-time for the degree. Members of the Department of Arts gave me valuable support and the Research Degrees Committee always provided welcome encouragement. The Polytechnic Library Staff were invariably patient and obliging and I am grateful to Mr. John Nockells, Subject Adviser in Humanities, for ensuring that the area of my research was adequately resourced.

Finally, I would especially like to thank my internal supervisor, Dr Vivien Wylie, of the Polytechnic, Wolverhampton, for all her thorough and perceptive criticism and for her unfailing interest and care, and Dr. Damian Grant of Manchester University, for responding positively to my initial ideas and suggesting a structure for the foundations of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

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During two hundred years of urbanisation and industrialisation, British poetry has often seemed more concerned with the natural and rural world. The thesis uses this paradox to explore two particular aspects of Twentieth Century poetry of the natural and rural world - its attitude and orientation towards the actual changing conditions of its subject matter and the significance of this in literary value judgements. To consider these ideological questions in a way that maintains the specificity and creativity of experience and of literature, Raymond Williams's concept of "structure of feeling" is introduced.

In addition, two broad, historical approaches to this poetry are distinguished: the first involves the transformation of pastoral into rural realism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while the second, which dates from the Romantic revival, offers a poetry of personal experience and metaphysical enquiry. In early Twentieth Century poetry, these approaches frequently converge to form a common front against modernism, while simultaneously, particularly in Edward Thomas and D H Lawrence, fresh importance is attached to the idea of nature poetry for metaphysical enquiry. In considering the post-war revival of nature and rural poetry, the original approaches are redefined in terms of a materialist /metaphysical polarity. For Hugh MacDiarmid and Ted Hughes, the tension within this polarity is claimed to be especially productive, while in writers like Hopkins and R S Thomas, a basic commitment to metaphysical orthodoxy is seen to be damagingly incompatible with the principles of free imaginative enquiry and the ontological autonomy of nature.

The two central questions of the thesis about Twentieth Century poetry of the natural and rural world, those concerning social change and metaphysical enquiry, are related in two ways: through attention to the cultural mediation of poetic language and form and through demonstrating that creative response to the full conditions of life is politically and metaphysically fundamental.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CRITICAL APPROACH

(i) The unexpected survival of the natural and rural world in contemporary British poetry.

The natural and rural world is still important in the work of many contemporary British poets. R S Thomas and Ted Hughes are the best known of these writers, but Jon Silkin, Seamus Heaney, Charles Tomlinson and Donald Davie also have considerable reputations; among lesser-known writers are Ted Walker, P J Kavanagh and Chris Torrance. Other writers like Geoffrey Hill have written poetry with a marked topographical dependence, while Auden, Bunting, MacDiarmid and Dylan Thomas, important figures primarily associated with rather earlier periods, have also used the natural and rural to a greater or lesser extent. This continued interest is surprising for two reasons, one social and the other literary. Socially, the emphasis this century has been on city life and development, while in certain respects the countryside itself has been urbanised: many village communities have expanded to provide housing for those who work in towns and the number of people actually employed on the land has decreased sharply. Agriculture has become mechanised and industrial methods of production are now essential to the farmer. It is true that the conservation and ecology lobby has responded to the threat to the countryside with such activities as protecting specialised habitats, cleaning up polluted rivers and lakes, resisting the uprooting of long-established hedge-rows and woodland and trying to prevent the construction of new towns, motorways and airports in "green" areas, but these things are of small account beside that gradual shifting of the countryside to the periphery of the

public frame of reference, which began towards the end of the eighteenth century with the Industrial Revolution. There is a feeling of centrality about urban life, which brings rural and nature poetry under immediate suspicion: is it resisting change and progress, avoiding the real issues, escaping into rural backwaters, mouldering on nostalgia? How can major poetry, rather than the poetry of mere reaction, be created from an environment that gives so little to the spirit of the age? These questions will persist, but that they can be answered is demonstrated by Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Binsey Poplars" (1879) which, like all nineteenth century nature poems, must face the same suspicion that nature poems of the twentieth century face. The success of "Binsey Poplars" is that the destruction of the "sweet especial rural scene" becomes representative in a way that is quite unforced. Experience, in the agony of the pricked eye-ball and the felling of the poplars, is unified and it is the depth at which this unification takes place and its complexity, that makes the poem successful and not any special claims it might make as a nature poem or a poem dealing with the destruction of beauty. There is also no feeling that there is any narrowing of scope because this is "nature poetry":

> Since country is so tender
> To touch, her being só slender,
> That, like this sleek and seeing ball
> But a prick will make no eye at all ...[1]

The literary reasons that make the persistence of nature and rural poetry suprising, lie in the strength and influence of the work of Pound, the later Yeats and Eliot; for much early twentieth century poetry that seems derivative and oppressively unimaginative by comparison with theirs, is nature poetry.. In addition, the modernists' demonstration that poetry could have forms and language equal to the confusing variety of contemporary experience, and the complexity and width of their intellectual reference, invalidated the idea of a specialised subject-matter for poetry, particularly

one as exhausted as the countryside, which apparently could evoke only a very limited range of emotion.[2] Nature might be in the poetry of the modernists incidentally, but there could be nothing like "nature poetry". Eliot demonstrates this holistic view of poetry's subject matter in the "Fire Sermon" section of The Waste Land,[3] where the despoiled landscape is created as much from observed (though changed) nature as from the deserts of the Bible and the myths of anthropology. To make use of the idyllic associations of the countryside while avoiding the well-worn Georgian grooves, Eliot turns to literary quotation - to Spenser ("Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song") and the sixteenth century onomatopoeic words for the nightingale's song ("jug, jug" and "tereu"[4]). These pastoral traces underlie the description of the industrial landscape and Eliot is able to draw on the changed nature of the river as it flows though a modern city, without insisting on those conventional and automatic rural regrets (though there are suggestions of these somewhere in the background), which would destroy the poem's comprehensiveness:

> The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
> Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
> Or other testimony of summer nights.
> (Ll. 177-179)
> A rat crept softly through the vegetation
> Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
> While I was fishing in the dull canal
> On a winter evening round behind the gashouse.
> (Ll. 187-190)

The modernist argument against nature poetry was cogent and convincing, yet still the category did not disappear: since 1945, in fact, it has not only thrived but has accommodated poetry of great quality. A sociological line of enquiry might explain something about this phenomenon - interesting connections between social class and literary material have already emerged in the sociology of literature.[5] Bradbury, for example, taking up Stephen Spender's description of the twentieth century "rebellion of the lower middle-

brows", comments that "part of the postwar reaction against Bloomsbury was a class-reaction" and: "reading through the novels of and poems of the 1950's, with their celebration of local ordinariness, we can sense the nature of [a] fairly new type of writer".[6] Such social-critical links could be made for the novels of a modern writer like Margaret Drabble, though now the "class reaction" would be in terms of the bourgeois "educated woman" who finds herself trapped and dispossessed in an archaic social structure.

English culture is sustained in some quite crucial respects, through ideas and notions about the "country" and "country life". To speculate briefly, sociological enquiry might be able to establish both the middle-class origin of the "nature poet" (or, just as valuably, the reverse) and a correlation of middle-class aspirations with English myths of rural living - the original concept of the garden suburb, the country squire as the archetype of economic independence combined with a respected and privileged position in a secure social structure, the rigmarole of ponies, gymkhanas and hunting, the spiritual rejection of meaningless city work manifested in the idea of the healing country retreat, etc, etc. The appearance and enjoyment of these myths in life may be paralleled in the appearance and enjoyment of them in poetry[7] and might, therefore, provide an "explanation" of nature poetry's persistence, though the uncritical evocation of a class-myth in any poetry (whether in John Betjeman or Adrian Henri) is unlikely to promote poetry worthy of any close attention. Sociological criticism, in fact, does little to explain why more complex kinds of nature and rural poetry should have flourished. Further, the availability of a literary tradition, vital as it is in its provision of ways of seeing and understanding (see my Chapter 1),

cannot be viewed as a determining pressure in the production of these kinds of poetry. As a way through this difficulty I argue, on p 18 of my "Introduction", for the centrality of material nature in human experience, for the creative "sensuous human activity" [8] involved in the perception of and interaction with this material nature and for the mythologising quality of poetry concerned with this perception and interaction. In that account, complex kinds of nature and rural poetry will recur, given the essential fact of the favourable conjunction of other historical and cultural conditions in response to what are basic human processes. In discussing these processes I often use the terms "materialist" and "metaphysical" and these now require preliminary definition.

Nature and rural poetry have always depended on the actuality of physical things. I have called this "materialist", though it is only, perhaps, in High MacDiarmid and the early Auden that materialist philosophy is consciously linked to what is more generally a disposition to observe, record and respond to the present and the concrete. Respect for this material nature is often intertwined, as in Lawrence, with reaction against "progressiveness" and industrialisation - the materialistic as opposed to the material.

"Materialist" poetry revalues nature by turning from extrinsic meanings to intrinsic significance. This, in turn, may lead back to a fresh kind of explanation or "metaphysics", but in the Hardy-Lawrence-Hughes tradition of such metaphysical nature poetry, metaphysics are used as imagery and imagery must be continuously renegotiated in the changing language and attitudes of each generation. I have called this "the nature poetry of unorthodox metaphysical enquiry" and I have argued that it was begun by Wordsworth, who first sought to ob-

serve and record the process of his own interaction with nature. The resulting poetry is mythologised, and though culturally specific, it is harnessed to the recurrent concern to provide a final context for human experience. This is amplified on pp.17-18 below.* Though, for convenience, I discuss modern poetry in terms of a materialist/metaphysical polarity I also claim that contemporary nature poetry thrives best within this polarity. This is clearest in the work of MacDiarmid and Hughes, who are devoutly materialist in the primacy they give to physical being and presence, but metaphysical in their exploration of the unknown through the imagery of the known. My criticism of poets such as Hopkins and R.S.Thomas, who write from within orthodox religion, comes from a feeling that in the interests of existing beliefs, they inhibit the exploratory function of modern nature poetry.

(ii) <u>The nature of the critical approach to be followed and a justification of its importance for literary practice</u>.

Given the persistence of poetry of the natural and rural world in British literature, and the paradox of that persistence, the intention of this thesis is to review such poetry with two specific considerations in mind. The first is concerned with the poetry's attitude and orientation towards the real, changing conditions of rural life and the second with the significance of these attitudes and orientations in literary value judgements. I refer to "the poetry's attitude and orientation" because we are dealing here with much more than authorial ideology. The pattern and form of the discourse, with its language and imagery, bears an ideological accumulation greater than that peculiar to the "author", who may, in fact, be quite overwhelmed - as in my Chapter 1 example of the over-development of the pastoral convention, prior to its subordination to new visionary forms in the Romantic period. But I also argue that Ted Hughes's

* Among other references, see also p.63 ff, pp.161-62 and p.271.

poetic achievement has much to do with his understanding, and subsequent manipulation, of the commonplace ideological categories of his early poetry. I am claiming a figurative "consciousness" for poetry which may be partly that of the poet and partly or wholly the property of the discourse. Key terms in this analysis will be the "set" of the text, in the sense of the general coherence of its attitudes and orientation, and its "poetic voice".

In introducing "the real, changing conditions of rural life" I am assuming that history can establish, or attempt to establish, the nature of these conditions. One position on the use of such material concerns the regulation of critical judgement i.e. the principle that judgements should be made according to criteria of awareness of, or truthfulness to, conditions outside the literary work.[9] The clearest examples of this are where the criteria derive from extreme religious or political commitment; usually the work of art will be expected to serve in a particular cause and its quality will be judged by its practical influence. Don Lee's "Black Poetics/for the many to come"[10] makes political effectiveness its starting point, just as the "orthodox" Marxist school of Zhadonov under Stalin demanded arts that furthered the cause of the proleteriat, strict adherence to party policy and "correctness" in the portrayal of social reality. Liberal claims for the autonomy of art, that art is a criticism of life and so acts independently of its social base or that art is "the only material object in the universe which may possess internal harmony"[11] are judged as illusory - sophistications of the enemy ideology. (Antithetical to this approach, to which there is no answer in its own terms, would be the relativism of a purely descriptive sociology of

literature that did not recognise literary value.) At this point it should be stressed that liberal criticism is not always outraged by prescriptiveness: certainly there is a clear extreme which includes direct censorship or intimidation, but the intermediate zone of disguised control (within institutions of education., for example, which are actually dependent on the values of the dominant culture) is not seen as oppressive. At another level, exhortations to certain kinds of artistic practice, in manifestoes for example, are understood as only figuratively excluding other kinds of art.[12]

A writer may fore-close the category of nature poetry, manifesto-style, because of other pressing concerns:

> Solely because of the increasing disorder
> In our cities of class struggle
> Some of us have now decided
> To speak no more of cities by the sea, snow on roofs, women
> The smell of ripe apples in cellars, the senses of the flesh, all
> That makes a man round and human
> But to speak in future only about the disorder
> And so become one-sided, reduced ...
> [so as not to] ... engender
> Approval of a world so many-sided; delight in
> The contradictions of so bloodstained a life
> You understand.[13]

Or, nature poetry could be called to fulfil other extra-literary criteria, the success of a nature poem being measured purely, for example, in terms of its ecological or scientific accuracy or, maybe, its anti-pastoralism.

Though I am in favour of criticism promoting particular literary interests (as I do here with nature poetry for metaphysical enquiry), I do not in general see that the existence of objective historical facts or "the real changing conditions of rural life" means that literature should necessarily treat those

conditions in any particular way or even treat them accurately, unless accuracy is the declared convention. In The Fight for Shelton Bar at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, in 1975, for example, a report on the struggle to keep the steelworks open was given each evening and one expected this to be factual - truth was the convention. But in Bond's The Fool (1976), about John Clare, one did not expect the play's sequence of poverty/enclosure/revolt to be a strict historical analysis. Bond's organisation of a dramatic chain of cause and effect, out of an inter-related complex of historical facts, determined by the landowner/peasant mode of production, displayed instead "truths". This is realism of the kind recommended by Lukacs.[14] It does not lose its way in the subjectivity of naturalism: its explanation is inherent. In another way, as John Barrell has shown,* Clare's own poetic manipulation of historical detail deflects his poetry from the kind of faithful reporting it is usually seen as performing.

Is there, then, no responsibility towards the objective historical record? It can only be repeated that the attitude and orientation of the discourse towards this record needs to be precisely revealed. Then it is a formalist or literary-critical matter, looking at this or that particular poem, to argue for the aesthetic significance of its attitudes and orientation. The case is less open than it may appear here, however, because of the crucial relationship suggested by Raymond Williams between the "structures of feeling" in lived experience and in literature. This is explored below, but one essential strand of the argument claims that an inadequate or limited mode of perceiving historical change in life can either be transformed into a more progressive and complex structure of feeling in literature or it can

* See below p. 58 ff

chronically weaken the formal qualities of literature.

In taking up a formalist position at the point of literary judgement, I am not, of course, severing the work from its complex determinants, though I am saying that it is perilous to peg judgement, which involves balancing many factors, to one factor. That is why it is important to stress the variable significance of attitudes and orientations to real conditions in literary value judgements. One needs to show how one poem's dependence on a certain structure of feeling may be calamitous while another poem "understands" the nature of that same structure of feeling sufficiently to use it effectively. Sensitive observation of changing conditions is important, but understanding the conventional use of that sensitive observation in poetry and incorporating it in poetry, is the final question for criticism. (It may also be the reason why the poetry of a reactionary like Yeats appears to resist its author's ideology). My critical contention goes beyond mere formalism, however, in that I would say that the best contemporary nature and rural poetry (following the achievements of Hardy, Lawrence, Edward Thomas and Frost) is both aware of change and uses that awareness imaginatively. In the second property, as in "Binsey Poplars", the category of nature poetry actually becomes unimportant beside the achievement. The same sort of development may be noted in Keats's "Ode to Autumn", for instance, in which the language of personification and metaphors of sense experience produce an immediate "Shakespearian" effect of unstrained power and forward movement - only later might one reflect "that was also a nature poem". Compared with Wordsworth, it is also no doubt true that Keats, Shelley and Coleridge do not "announce themselves" as nature poets.

Emphasising the incorporation of observation or sensitivity does, it must be admitted, elevate assessment, and, therefore, ideas of literary value above social and historical context, in the manner described by F R Leavis in his two essays "Literature and Society" and "Sociology and Literature". One must be clear about the nature and purpose of such judgements for it is not the inevitable making of literary judgements that is so suspect today, but rather the hegemonic force and abuse of those judgements. In the two essays, Leavis describes:

> ... the principle that literature will yield to the sociologist, or anyone else, what it has to give only if it is approached as literature. For what I have in mind is no mere industrious searching for "evidence" and collecting of examples, in whatever happens to have been printed and preserved. The "literature" in question is something in the definition of which terms of value-judgement figure essentially and something accessible only to the reader capable of intelligent and sensitive criticism.[17]

And again,

> ... no "sociology of literature" and no attempt to relate literary studies with sociological will yield much profit unless informed and controlled by a real and intelligent interest - a first-hand critical interest - in literature.[18]

Leavis analyses Dr Schücking's essay, "The Sociology of Literary Taste" (1931), with its reference to Thackeray as "the greatest English novelist of the nineteenth century" to prove his point, whereas Alexandre Beljame, Leslie Stephen, Walter Raleigh and L C Knights are brought in to show the only useful kind of sociological comment on literature - that of the sensitive and trained literary critic. Schücking has, of course, blundered into critical judgements without the resources to give substance to his pronouncements and very few would disagree with Leavis when he suggests that you must be able to read before you can use

literary values in a text as evidence. But Leavis is dangerously misguided in his bidding for the territory of other disciplines:

> What one has to suggest in general by way of urging on students of politics and society the claims of literary studies (I don't mean the ordinary academic kind) to be regarded as relevant and important is that thinking about political and social matters ought to be done by minds of some real literary education and done in an intellectual climate informed by a vital literary culture.[19]

In Leavis' later writings, in The Human World, for example, there is the same anti-democratic nonsense about a literary élite. The real danger, though, is the extent to which such ideas pervade the institutions of English Literature. Literature, in fact, has no special claims on the attention of anyone, student of politics or society included. The proposition is the wrong way round: once having centred on literature, students then need a social and intellectual culture to nourish their feelings for literature and to engage with the questions of the day. A feeling for literature does not develop in a vacuum: for many it may begin as psychological liberation and this private psychological attraction must surely persist, but if any attempt at communication of response is to take place, if anything is to be said in the language of the day, it must be prompted by a sense of social situation.[20] While I accept that to use notions of literary value as evidence a sociologist must also be a perceptive reader, this does not preclude investigations of the notions of value themselves. The question, "this is so, isn't it?", is admirable in dialectical discussion, but it has also been begged for too long by the Literary Academy, which its inert circularity serves to perpetuate in isolation from social needs. Something like Terry Eagleton's perception of the relativity of critical judgement needs more attention:

> What we judge in the plays (of Shakespeare) as relevant, what we actually see, is shaped by what we see in our own culture, in ourselves.[21]

The idea of situation, how we are "situated" with regard to a work of art is crucial here. We are not able to make objective judgements about art, because our judgements depend on perceptions which are themselves socially derived.

Bearing these limitations in mind, it seems sound, with the Leavisian notion of critical assessment as still fundamental to my study, to accept that the use I make of extra-literary material (though substituting an awareness of the ideological and historical relativity of this assessment for the tendencies towards monumentalism in Leavis) must also be in terms of responding to the creative presentation of that material. This involves the close and intelligent reading Leavis demands and is a very different matter to saying there is no other possible approach to extra-literary considerations: literature can be approached as just another social institution, a cultural manifestation to be studied like any other. There is no threat to "the blossom and the fragrancy" in this, just as the blossom and fragrancy of religion were never really threatened in the 1860 British Association debate between Huxley and Wilberforce. What were threatened were historically determined doctrines and social controls reified in the Church as an institution. In any case, the critic cannot prescribe exactly what the sociologist should offer: no one can tell what impetus and insights religion, ethics, philosophy, sociology, psychology or some other discipline may offer to criticism. But in relating literature to life, a critic's judgement must be informed by a sense of social and cultural situation and an intelligence kept vital by engagement in other fields. Without this wider engagement, criticism, like the work of

writers or teachers who are similarily isolated, is likely to be sterile.

My final introductory point about my terms of reference affirms the need to declare an interest in criticism. As Raymond Williams has said:

> ... I cannot help feeling that this culture is rotten with criticism, that is why I now think it is important to restore the sense that unless critical practice is related to some advocacy of literary practice, it is going to be much nearer to what is described in a philistine way as merely nagging and fault-finding...[23]

There are many kinds of literary practice that I see as worth advocating: the committed theatre of contemporary playwrights such as Brenton, Bond, Hare, Edgar and McGrath immediately springs to mind as making a direct contribution to the struggle for a more humane and just society. But this, of course, is a struggle pitched at many levels: the growing understanding in England of the notion of cultural hegemony is returning academic life and its more obscure products to a position of importance. For example, it now seems vital to understand and combat the ideological character of syllabus and teaching practice at degree level. As we perhaps always suspected, there is something odd about viewing expensively-endowed, national institutions as powerless, irrelevant, fusty or ivory-tower. Apart from the two poles of clearly committed art and difficult hegemonic debate, I would want to sustain certain other levels of critical practice - firstly with regard to poetry in general and then with regard to nature and rural poetry.

The current state of poetry forcibly illustrates the workings of cultural deprivation: serious feelings are still popularly seen as appropriately placed in verse or heightened poetic language - memorial verses in newspapers or on tomb stones, verses in greetings cards, the words of popular songs, "texts" for daily living to be

hung on kitchen walls, etc. Additionally, the comic forms of rhyme and limerick have an undisputed place in entertainment and social exchange. In contradiction, "Poetry" is despised and marginal, which goes some way, incidentally, to explaining that extraordinary poetry reading atmosphere of camaraderie, brashness, under-confidence, self-revilement and desperation. This is clearly much more than asymmetrical cultural development - harking back to just-recoverable forms in the absence of new ones. As every English teacher of young children knows, heightened language and organised rhythmical patterns are potentially very far from social alienation. There is an important role for criticism in all this, not just at the level of education in schools and for teachers in schools, but also with respect to the work of a 'public' poet like Adrian Mitchell.

Why, though, should critical practice adopt nature and rural poetry? Children's anthologies, no doubt, feature such poetry for the same reason that kittens are featured on birthday cards - because of a built-in protection against painful or corrupting social reality. Furthermore, the privileged have largely bought up the countryside for similar reasons, whereas political commitment, in the Marxist tradition stretching back both to scientific progressivism (celebrating the mastery of nature) and to the primacy of the urban proletariat in bringing about revolutionary change, has often involved 'anti-ruralism'. Going a step further, the nature poetry of the Romantics must be understood at one level as bourgeois individualism turning to isolated, quasi-religious solutions to redress socially-derived feelings of unease and alienation.

In answer to such objections, it is first of all plain that nature and rural poetry need to be reclaimed as, I believe, some modern poets have been doing. For it is the importance of the basic attributes of nature and the poetry associated with it, that accounts for its colonisation by particular class interests, both economic and cultural. But Nature is more than a place for reaction. The Italian Marxist, Sebastiano Timpanaro, has worked theoretically in this area, returning materialism itself to the natural world. He is very far from biological reductionism, but he does claim that:

> we cannot ... deny or evade the element of passivity in experience: the external situation which we do not create but which imposes itself on us.[24]

Both Terry Eagleton and Raymond Williams have commented on the "universals" involved in this proposition and I quote them both because although they are talking about much wider questions than nature alone, it is essential to locate the material of nature poetry, within the normal concerns of modern life, urbanised, industralised and collective though that life is:

> And even an historically alien work may 'speak' to us in the present, for human animals (as Sebastiano Timpanaro has reminded us - "Considerations on Materialism", New Left Review 85, May/June 1974) share a biological structure even where they do not share a direct cultural heritage. Birth, nourishment, labour, kinship, sexuality, death are common to all social formations and to all literature; and it is no rebuttal of this to insert the correct but commonplace, caveat that the biological 'infrastructure' is always historically mediated. So indeed it is; one merely repeats that what is variably mediated is a common biological structure.[25]

For Williams, Timpanaro:

> ... reminds us that certain works of art expressing feelings of sexual love, of fear of death, of grief and loss at the death of others, while undoubtedly varied by particular cultural forms, retain elements of common content which enable them to communicate, actively and not only as documents, beyond and across historical periods and cultures.[26]

Williams goes on to speculate that developments of this thinking might investigate, as art is <u>made</u> in a material process, the innate biological significance of such a quality as rhythm in, for example, music, dance and language. That it is necessary to quote such obvious statements is a measure of the distance of my subject matter, which is allied to, but even further out than the comments on man's biological "infrastructure" made above, from the traditional concerns of leftist criticism.

To move from a view of man situated in nature with the rest of nature providing legitimate concerns, to a fully-developed defence of nature poetry for metaphysical enquiry (the role I ascribe to the poetry of Hopkins, Hardy, Edward Thomas, Lawrence and Hughes) is much more problematic. At one level the facts of the displacement of religion and the bourgeois isolation of the individual (both important in this "enquiry") require not just explanation, but satisfaction. False consciousness, in this argument, remains as a real physical appetite, a fact of existence. The habit of subjectivising our experience is strong: we may understand that a mystical feeling or "spots of time" result from peculiar psychological conjunctures and not from anything in nature but still we experience a sense of significance, much as we do with deja-vu. But beyond this level of explanation, there exists a rich and full responsiveness in humanity and it is here that we may find "universals" in which to ground "metaphysical enquiry". In this sense of creative superfluity we do not check out nature to see what's in it for our epoch; instead we immediately inter-act with it creatively. I now want to place this argument, easily acceptable to bourgeois liberalism, within more "socially conscious" critical traditions, for these

traditions lose heavily if they consign nature and rural poetry to the other side.[27]

Marx's theory of human nature is a theory of its creativity. Man must creatively objectify himself, but under conditions of deprivation, denial and exploitation, this objectification becomes alienation. Man does not then see himself in the product of his labour. In exploring Marx's development of Hegel's aesthetic, Adolfo Vazquez claims that the primary aim of art is "the satisfaction of man's general need to express and affirm himself in the objective world".[28] This is a process of creative response and is seen as a higher form of labour;(how art must function under differing historical conditions is another matter). One needs, however, to go on to stress the reverential and the mysterious in the creative response,the sense of the separate life of created things. This aspect of human responsiveness is undiminished by scientific explanation and must be distinguished from false consciousness or mystification. When Lawrence writes about a snake, or MacDiarmid about stones or Hughes about skylarks, they are all mythologising their responses in the quest for poetic versions of those creative, sensory responses. This is what I have called nature poetry for metaphysical enquiry. It is not that Hughes will come up with a new version of God, though figuratively he repeatedly does, but rather that he is able to clarify, through culturally mediated forms and ways of seeing, the inevitable and universal human response to the full scope of our environment - an environment which includes the biological and the natural.

(iii) Literature and Society

In discussing extra-literary considerations and in stressing situation and historical relativity, I have been acknowledging a range of Marxist critical theory and practice. We are, of course, all Marxists now in the sense that we are all Freudians or Darwinians: Marx is indispensable for an understanding of industrial society. In George Steiner's words,

> Whether explicitly or unconsciously, our whole contemporary view of art is penetrated with a Marxist awareness of social context and historical dynamism.[29]

The "pre-Marxist" Raymond Williams, acknowledging the similarities to strands of Marxist thought in the independent conclusions of men such as Carlyle, Ruskin and William Morris, concluded that:

> The one vital lesson which the nineteenth century had to learn - and learn urgently because of the very magnitude of its change - was that the basic economic organisation could not be separated and excluded from its moral and intellectual concerns. Society and individual experience were alike being transformed and this driving agency, which there were no adequate traditional procedures to understand and interpret, had, in depth, to be taken into consciousness. Others besides Marx insisted on this and worked towards it but Marx, in giving a social and historical definition to the vaguer idea of "industrialism", made the decisive contribution.[30]

The clear formulation that Marx contributed, he summarised himself in the "Preface" to A Critique of Pure Economy (1859):

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.[31]

If this places art and literature in the superstructure, in the consciousness of men determined by their social being, it does not imply a simple reflectionist or determinist model. To counter this traditional anti-Marxist implication (see Appendix A) I would place next to it a recent statement of Stuart Hall:

> Marxism attempts to understand a social formation as a "complex unity", composed of different levels which exhibit their own "relative autonomy" while being determinate "in the last instance".[32]

A huge space is opened up by "relative autonomy" and "in the last instance" but it is plain that any Marxist theory of literature and society (and here, even liberal critics[33] have admitted their dependence on Marxist theory) will finally return to the relations of production. This reveals a new and fundamental level to my preceding comments on literature and society, as those comments mostly concerned questions of evaluation and judgement: it now remains for me to place the literature I am considering within the "complex unity" of the social formation.

This is especially difficult with poetry, a medium, as Terry Eagleton puts it, that parades the "dominance of signifier over signified".[34] Eagleton's structuralist definition of poetry is useful in drawing attention to the temperamental difference between it and other modes of discourse such as naturalistic or realistic prose:

> The literary text's lack of a real direct referent constitutes the most salient fact about it: its fictiveness ... the 'poetic' is characterised by ... a 'disturbance' of the normative relations between signifier and signified. The effect of this disturbance is so to highlight and intensify the signifying practice itself as to produce, in formalist parlance, a 'defamiliarisation' of experience. This is not the case with every kind of literary discourse: it is not true, for example, of much realist or any naturalistic language. But 'poetic' language nonetheless reveals a relation between signifier and signified shared also, if less obviously, by the realist or naturalist text.[35]

Those who handle this mode of discourse have generated the most potent literary myths, not because they have an inexplicable creative genius, but because their mode of discourse originated in magical processes and has evolved through history to maintain itself as a magical category. Though George Thomson's account of this evolution in The Prehistoric Aegean (1949), no doubt simplifies and reconstructs, he is surely right to associate poetical speech with the mimetic dance and other collective acts of ritual in traditional human societies. Poetic speech is seen, there, as part of the religious attempt to control or contain experience and feeling,and as such is "a medium more intense, appropriate to collective acts of ritual, fantastic, rhythmical, magical".[36] Thomson sees these processes as social maintenance, just as in his account of Keats's sonnet "Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou!" the world is not changed, but Keats's subjective attitude to it is changed - "that is the dialectics of poetry, as of magic".[37]

This is illuminating and presents a broad functional view of poetry which is particularly interesting in the context of a modern nature poet like Ted Hughes: but the complexities of poetic form and style at a given moment in history remain - the conjunction, for example, of English Romantic poetry with revolutionary change and ideology, which is both a general theoretical question and a very precise matter of historical and literary detail.

On the general question, one of David Craig's "hypothetical laws"[38] of literary development must be cited:

> A change in literature and a change in history that resemble each other (e.g. an emphasis on control, a seeking after spontaneity) are likely to be related, not directly, but by deriving from the same cause further back in history.[39]

Kindred developments are, therefore, likely to be "cognate": it seems to me that a book like L C Knights's Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (1937) exemplifies the sort of excellent criticism that can follow from this formulation.

Turning to the precise matter of historical and literary detail, one is faced with daunting organic intricacies - like those faced by Terry Eagleton when he rejects a reflectionist view of The Waste Land:

> To put the issue in more complex theoretical terms: the influence of the economic 'base' on The Waste Land is evident not in a direct way, but in the fact that it is the economic base which in the last instance determines the state of development of each element of the superstructure (religious, philosophical and so on) which went into its making, and moreover determines the structural inter-relations between those elements, of which the poem is a particular conjuncture.[40]

In Criticism and Ideology (1976), Eagleton bravely attempts to specify and schematise the material infrastructure of artistic production[41] but in practice this results in an algebra that he cannot use - and does not use in the concrete critical analysis of text and ideology that follows in Chapter IV of that book. That concrete analysis of generic tension is pitched, in fact, at a general theoretical level. The attempt to found a "scientific" criticism by analogy with the methodology of the natural sciences, is seriously disabling - the kind of historical fallacy that Eagleton himself, following Brecht, points out in Lukacs's fetishising of nineteenth-century realism.[42] The particular problem of the superstructural fibres of The Waste Land remains. It is here, I feel, that models of total explanation or reconstruction

should be put aside. Decisions must be made about which fibres to explore and how to explore them, as they must be made about which poems to read: so partial an application of theory is dangerously near to escaping theory, but particularity loses its significance if one makes it part of a mass "scientific" exercise, that is itself an illusion of our contemporary outlook. My own illusion, no doubt, is linked to my "re-writing" of literary paradigms and to the value-laden selectivity and partiality of my criticism as it tries to pin-point important interactions between literature and society.* The debt to Raymond Williams is clear, but I hope to show in the last section of this "Introduction" that particular causal descriptions of the literature and society relationship are possible within a critique of his concept of "structure of feeling".

(iv) The relationship of this study to contemporary criticism

Twentieth-century literary studies in England have continuously sought a responsible role within social debate. It is ironic, though, that the enormously influential Leavis, whose theoretical work and social criticism stress the vital relationship of literature to life, should be remembered, however unjustly, as a critical purist, whose concept of the trained reader engaging with the best texts has made the literary critic into a specialist without a field. The progressive humanism and the reactionary politics of Scrutiny have been explained by Terry Eagleton in what, to me, is an admirably clear and entirely convincing critique.[43] Eagleton shows how Scrutiny's élitist

* See above p 10 for a defence of this position.

and idealist solutions, "the 'organic community' of a mythicised English past, the 'University English School' as the spiritual essence of the social formation",[44] do not threaten basic structures:

> ... Scrutiny's historic function (complex and changing though it was), was at one level reasonably plain: it was to bring about that drastic reconstruction of forms, values, discourses and lineages within the aesthetic region of ideology which, at a point of serious historical crisis, would play its part in revitalising and reproducing the dominant ideology as a whole.[45]

Apart from Scrutiny, only the work of Raymond Williams has made a sustained case for the centrality of literature in English social development. In Culture and Society (1958), Williams himself seems to follow the long line of eighteenth and nineteenth century writers discussed in that text, writers like Coleridge and Arnold, who had a sense of the natural relevance of literature to the central intellectual concerns of the day. Relevance for them, as for Williams, did not mean a bending of literature into public service, but a bringing together in the consciousness of literary judgement with their deepest social concerns. The hostility to Williams's desire for this kind of understanding was evident in the reviews of The Long Revolution:

> The agitated waving of flags at one frontier after another, the announcement of property rights and local standards of cultivation in one field after another, made me think for some years that I was in a strange, even enemy country, though it was of the particular experience of that country that I was writing.[46]

If this can be explained as the territorial outrage of academic specialists, criticism of Williams's effort from the Left has a more challenging premise. Again Eagleton is able to clarify complex historical developments, developments which Williams lived in and through by testing every impulse against his own experience.[47] It is refreshing, after the moral assaults

explanatory revaluation of Williams is a contribution to a common, developing tradition.

In Eagleton's account we see Williams's early work as a monumental reformist effort to salvage a place for the Left and for working-class culture, out of the essentially conservative "Culture and Society" tradition. The clearest example of this, perhaps, is identified by the New Left Review editors in Politics and Letters when they point out that Burke and Carlyle receive the greatest honour in the first half of the book, but only because their reactionary writings and attitudes are deliberately excluded by Williams. Williams recants on them and on Arnold and Lawrence, but his essential defence is the reformist one - he was attempting to "recover the true complexity of the tradition ... confiscated ..." by reactionary ideology. This allowed him:

> ... to refute the increasing contemporary use of the concept of culture against democracy, socialism, the working class or popular education, in terms of the tradition itself. The selective version of culture could be historically controverted by the writings of the thinkers who contributed to the formation and discussion of the idea.[48]

For Williams, even subordinate classes already shared a common culture and could identify themselves within it - the task was reclamation. Similarly, "experience" always went beyond ideology and people could create meaning and value through their own lived experience - an illusion, in Eagleton's view. In all of this it is important to stress that a book like Culture and Society becomes a more valuable work when its argument receives historical comment and explanation.

With The Country and the City (1972), which is clearly Marxist at last, Williams attacked the very myth of organicism that

supported his early work and, most recently, in Politics and Letters (1979), pp 393-437, he has espoused "revolutionary rupture" - only, however, because he sees reformism as a tool of the State actually delaying or working counter to the prospect of a solution.

In the wider field of Cultural Studies, changes like those in Williams's own views have accompanied very significant developments of practice, as can be seen, for example, in Dick Hebdige's first chapter, "From Culture to Hegemony" in Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979). By comparison, literary criticism is static, for in spite of Williams'ssteady movement through the 1970's towards a clear Marxist position, it is quite appropriate for me to begin my next section with an account of passages from that much compromised book, Culture and Society, and to find that those passages are not susceptible to the kind of critical charges encountered above.

(v) Theory and history of the concept of "structure of feeling".

The final sections of this "Introduction" seek to derive a conceptually satisfactory way of considering nature and rural poetry's relationship to reality, from Williams'swork on "structures of feeling".

In Williams, the "structure of feeling" of a writer's class and time imposes a way of seeing the external world while the experiential imagination offers the possibility (not fulfilled in the examples below) of transforming this social "set" into new artistic structures of feeling. These criteria can be seen at work in Chapter V of Culture and Society on the industrial novels. Williams is able to show the effect of "certain common

assumptions within which the direct response was undertaken" and to indicate artistic limitations directly related to that structure of feeling. In the passage on Mrs Gaskell's Mary Barton, Williams distinguishes between the conscientious documentary reporting which has "a slightly distancing effect" and "the genuine imaginative re-creation"[49] of parts of the novel, such as the chapter "Poverty and Death". Williams proposes that the continuation of this combination of sympathetic observation and imaginative identification might have made a great novel of its kind, but he goes on to argue that John Barton is soon beyond the range of Mrs Gaskell's powers. The upper and middle class fear of violence at the time (John Barton was a political murderer appointed by a trade union) causes conflict between attempts at identification and imaginative recoil and the novelist's control is upset. The end of the book is typical - cancellation of the difficulties and removal of everyone to Canada.

The relevance of this model to my criteria is clear: the questions of attitudes and orientation towards social change and how they affect one's judgement when they appear in the literary work are paralleled in my terms of reference (p.6).

A basic point here is that Williams is not advocating party-line literature: at the end of the chapter, he finds Felix Holt marred by George Eliot's surrendering of observation and conclusion to a structure of feeling that "she was at once too hesitant to transcend and too intelligent to raise into any lively embodiment".[50] The possibility of transcendence, which is imaginative, is there, as well as the unflattering possibility of a lively but unintelligent right-wing caricature.

My last example from Chapter V of the usefulness of this concept as a criterion, is Williams's criticism of Hard Times. It is in Dickens's treatment of the working people, particularly Blackpool and Slackbridge, that his response is most clearly seen as,

> more ... a symptom of the confusion of industrial society than an understanding of it .[51]

Bounderby is a villain and an inhuman master, Slackbridge is a villain because he is a trade unionist; Sleary, though Dickens is turning to a world outside industrialism, is morally vital and a free spirit, Blackpool is a working-class saint because he is not a trade unionist. In Blackpool and Slackbridge, Dickens incorporates a structure of feeling without his accustomed zest and power: the break-down results from the imagination failing to transform and transcend somewhat shallow and hampered observation.

Chapter V of Culture and Society does, then, make the case for the usefulness of the concept of "structures of feeling", but in a genre where the connections between literature and society are an explicit part of the subject matter. To establish the concept in the analysis of different kinds of poetry, it is necessary to explore its ramifications more fully.

Williams first used the term in Preface to Film (1954) in order to stress that a period's "material life, the social organisation and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas" make up a unified totality and "when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart". This element he called "the structure of feeling of a period and it is only realizable through experience of the work of art itself, as a whole".[52] There are two important characteristics here - the idea of an essentially unanalysable totality, paralleled in Williams's subsequent insistence on "lived

experience" and the centrality of the work of art in providing access to this totality.

In Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (1952), another early and revealing source for consideration of the term, Williams read Ibsen as "the dramatist of blockages of liberation".[53] The motif of coming "to a tight place where you stick fast. There is no going forward or backward ..."[54] matched Williams' own predicament:

> In his plays, the experience of defeat does not diminish the value of the fight. That was precisely the personal 'structure of feeling' within which I lived from 1945 to 1951 at the deepest level.[55]

Personal testimony, here drastically limits the concept's potential to penetrate or destructure the experience of the past: the intrinsic "New Criticism" aspect, however (a circular process of saying you can only gain access to the sensibility of a period through its art, or its great art in Leavis's formulation), served Williams as well in his critical account of Ibsen as it was to later in The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence (1971).

In The Long Revolution (1961) Williams worked the term towards a theory of communication, for communication, as we know, depends on the most subtle and complex adjustments. He now stressed the unique "felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time", claiming that it is "only in our own time and place that we can expect to know, in any substantial way, the general organisation". We learn about certain elements of the past "as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole".[56] In art we have an approach to such lived experience with its sense of a shared understanding and Williams ultimately traces this to the "deep community" on which communication itself depends. Again

"almost any formal description would be too crude to express this nevertheless quite distinct sense of a particular and native style", this "particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression".[57] Williams goes on to locate structures of feeling in "generations", having already talked earlier of his "personal" structure of feeling in 1945-51, while later in Marxism and Literature (1977) he refers to a structure of feeling linked to the "rise of a class (England 1700-60)".[58] Access to past structures of feeling is via cultural artefacts, literature now appearing as one of many possible forms:

> Once the carriers of such a structure die, the nearest we can get to this vital element is in the documentary culture, from poems to buildings and dress fashions... [59]

But the cautions and limitations Williams voices about the concept in The Long Revolution are balanced by, for example, a chapter like "The Analysis of Culture" in which contradictions and tensions experienced in the 1840's are seen as articulated and, to some extent, resolved in the literature of the period.

In The Country and the City (1973), the concept of "structure of feeling" becomes once again a powerful mode of active analysis. I find this essential in dealing with the notion of pastoral and discuss it at some length in Chapter I (pp43-4). Finally, Williams has attempted an explicitly theoretical account of "structure of feeling" in Marxism and Literature, though I find less clarity in this than in earlier references. There is still the creative, intangible, irreducible quality: "structures of feeling can be defined as social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available".[60] Changes in form and convention still "in art and literature, are often among the

very first indications that such a new structure is forming".[61] The totality and specificity of the concept remains in opposition to the reification of analysis, but there is still hope for some precision in the approach to language as a record of social and cultural change. Additionally, the concept remains "a cultural hypothesis ... derived from attempts to understand such elements (as impulse, restraint and tone) and their connections in a generation or period and needing always to be returned, interactively, to such evidence".[62] In one respect, Williams signals a shift of emphasis. He says that "structures of experience" might be an alternative phrase, for he is describing "practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity".[63] The word "experience" does have over-tones of the analytical fixity Williams is resisting, but it also has a better sense of the flux, process and idiosyncracy he wishes to preserve.

(vi) <u>Critique of the concept of "structure of feeling" and its application.</u>

A "deliberately contradictory phrase, with which I have never been happy"[64] -Williams's own words have been endorsed by Stuart Hall:

> One of the most important non-conceptual concepts in <u>The Long Revolution</u> is that of the "structure of feeling", which exactly poses the problem of whether a "feeling" can have a "structure".[65]

For Hall, Williams's refusal of Marxism means "the absence of the terms he is in dialogue with" and he goes on to describe Williams's "semi-silent dialogue with European Marxism".[66] For Terry Eagleton the concept of structure of feeling "designates, in effect ...

ideology"[67] (the exact conflation Williams wishes to avoid),

while for Michael Green it:

> tries to capture (in fact too swiftly, in a collapse) both subjective meanings and something of the objective social structures to which they are a response.[68]

Williams's critics, all of whom pay tribute to his pioneering achievements, unanimously identify the failings of this concept and of much else in his work with the absence of a thriving English Marxist tradition. Until The Country and the City Williams's literary-critical terms were largely those of the conservative "Culture and Society" debate and it is not coincidental that Williams's gradual integration into the Marxist tradition has been taking place in step with the appearance in England of a whole range of Marxist channels of research and debate, such as Screen, New Left Review and the Working Papers from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Nevertheless, difficulties with the idea of structures of feeling remain and these are generally ascribed to its inadequate and contradictory theorisation.

As a precise tool in literary history, for instance, the concept looks extremely weak, as the editors of New Left Review reveal in their probing of what kinds of group actually share such structures of feeling.(Is it a generation? Yes. Then how can it refer to periods of 60 years? What is the median of a generation anyway? How can a chronological notion accommodate enormous differences in class-ideology? etc, etc.)[69] Further, though Williams insists on the correlation of real and literary experience, his criticism more often than not eschews such correlation in favour of the intrinsic historical evidence of the text. In any case, there are whole regions of economic reality which vitally determine our lives but which are quite inaccessible to

personal experience.[70]

To shift the grounds of the discussion to practice is to rediscover the success of the concept in, for example, Williams's excellent critical commentaries on the nineteenth-century novel, the drama of Ibsen and Brecht and the English country-house poems. The quotation below picks up two points central to the way I wish to use the concept in (i) the notion of internal literary evidence about human behaviour and feeling[71] and (ii) the vindication of the concept's usefulness in practice:

> ... it was a structure in the sense that you could perceive it operating in one work after another which weren't otherwise connected - people weren't learning it from each other; yet it was one of feeling much more than of thought - a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones, <u>for which the best evidence was often the actual conventions of literary or dramatic writing.</u> To this day I find that I keep coming back to this notion <u>from the actual experience of literary analysis rather than from any theoretical satisfaction with the concept itself.</u>[72] (emphasis added)

In approaching poetry, I would add another point that (iii), in Williams'swords, "some elements of a structure of feeling are, of course, only traceable through a rather close analysis of language ..." (though he continues that "the most normal evidence for such a structure is conventions, which are international").[73]

In two ways, at least, my use of the concept involves considerable modifications or alterations. One of these relates to Williams's own view that, as they are socially derived, we should evaluate the actual forms and conventions themselves: "the crucial evaluative function is the judgement of conventions themselves, from a deliberate and declared position of interest ... Certain conventions do less than others. If there is still place for evaluation in literature, then that is what has to be valued".[74]

Williams's belief in this has resulted in some of his best criticism - in The Country and the City, for example - but in the literature I consider here, I find it more significant to evaluate the use that is made of particular conventions, rather than the conventions themselves. Secondly, the concept of structure of feeling is unreliable in establishing direct links between literature and the historical record. The linkage between structures of feeling in reality and in literary products remains an essential part of the concept, but not a part that can be relied upon in analysis. The reason for this is the insufficient theorisation of the linkage. Discussing the distance between Marxist and other theories of "mass communications" and Marxist and other theories of "imaginative expression", "art", Williams has commented:

> The short-cut solution, in one powerful modern variant of Marxism, has been to unify these theories within a theory of Ideology; but the only thing right about this is the realisation that the theoretically separated "areas" have to be brought within a single discourse. The main error of this solution is that it substitutes Ideology (a general, coherent and monopolizing practical consciousness, with its operative functions in institutions, codes and texts), for the complex social relations within which a significant (including alternative and oppositional) range of activities, in a significant (including dominating and subordinated but also contesting) range of situations, were being at once expressed, produced and altered, in practice in contradictory as well as in coherent, directive ways.[75]

Essentially, this rejection of Althusserian ideology clears a space for the "alternative", the "oppositional", the "contesting" - the space of "lived experience". But Williams does not want to cut loose from some measure of determination. In "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", Williams saw dangers in Lukacs's concept of "totality", parallel as it is to his own notion of totality:

> It is very easy for the notion of totality to empty of its essential content the original Marxist proposition. For if we come to say that society is composed of a large number of social practices which form a concrete social whole, and if we give to each practice a certain specific recognition, adding only that they interact, relate and combine in very complicated ways, we are at one level much more obviously talking about reality, but

> we are at another level withdrawing from the claim that there is any process of determination. And this I, for one, would be very unwilling to do. Indeed, the key question to ask about any notion of totality in cultural theory is this: whether the notion of totality includes the notion of intention.[76]

It was to just the opposite danger that the English Marxists succumbed in their critical engagement with Scrutiny in the 1930's. The "received formula of base and superstructure" quickly led to a reductionism "which just will not survive any prolonged experience of actual works".[77] Williams's discussion of this débâcle returns our attention to the literary version of "lived experience":

> Marxism, as then commonly understood, was weak in just the decisive area where practical criticism was strong: in its capacity to give precise and detailed and reasonably adequate accounts of actual consciousness: not just a scheme or a generalisation but actual works, full of rich and significant and specific experience.[78]

It may now be clear why structure of feeling cannot be equated with ideology: ideology, however complex its mediation, implies the possibility of precise and complete explanation in, for example, the schematic manner of Eagleton's Criticism and Ideology, while structure of feeling insists on scope for autonomous activity and intervention.

In taking up those elements of the concept of structure of feeling concerned with the internality of the historical record and social relations in works of literature, I hope, nevertheless, through selective analysis, to throw some light on aspects of the general relationship between literature and society. I am also suggesting that in the absence of a theory that can do full justice to actual and to literary consciousness, personal judgements must be made about the most suitable places to implement structure of feeling as a critical tool and about the manner of its implementation. Whether this is a particularly subjective kind of formalism or a critical contribution that is genuinely dependent on social contextualisation, must be judged by reference to the chapters which follow. In any event, at

a time when Raymond Williams's work in relating literature and society is increasingly receiving recognition, it is important to try to use and develop the tradition of that work. To do this, I have, then, taken the key concept "structure of feeling". It is a suggestive term, like sensibility or imagination, and though it may not have been fully theorized or satisfactorily delimited in Williams, it has served as a very effective critical tool in a range of situations.

In this thesis I discuss a mode of literature (poetry) frequently associated with obscurantism and unreality, and kinds of poetry (nature, rural, pastoral) which, for some three hundred years, have themselves been associated with retreat and social irrelevance. The weakest poetry of this kind gives unambiguous ideological expression to particular social and political values. Its structure of feeling actually derives from a particular class-related outlook and it is itself evidence of that outlook. It is, in fact, little more than outlook, for aesthetic or imaginative qualities are absent from it.

At this level, "structure of feeling", whether in life or literature, could be equated with ideology. I have been especially interested, however, both in literary transformations and manipulations of such structures of feeling and in the creation of new structures of feeling in imaginative writing. The concept permits continuity between these levels of determination, transformation and creativity, whereas "ideology" disables imaginative autonomy and a non-specific term such as "outlook" carries none of the awareness of complex determination which is in "structure of feeling". More precise and

specialised terms, such as "poetic voice", are essential in criticism, but are not socially inclusive; they do not have those over-tones of literature within society that the word "structure" has in this context.

"Structure of feeling" contains the ideological and the non-determined and it is the tension between the two that this thesis explores. Additionally, structures of feeling themselves, as they appear in poetry, are a subject of the thesis. While literary works are characteristic of particular contexts, the most interesting works express unique and complex states of feeling about those contexts and this is the justification for the essentially intrinsic kind of criticism practised in the thesis. Writing of the visual image, John Berger claims that:

> Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked - and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people ...No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times. In this respect images are more precise and richer than literature. To say this is not to deny the expressive or imaginative quality of art, treating it as mere documentary evidence; the more imaginative the work, the more profoundly it allows us to share the artist's experience of the visible. 79

Imaginative literature does, however, produce a unique kind of "felt analysis", its own "image" of "lived experience", and this, even in cultural milieux far removed from its origins, remains as a social artefact that may legitimately be used as historical evidence of values, norms, attitudes, beliefs and feelings.

This whole position has been elaborated by the critic-sociologist Joan Rockwell who is actually much more interested in tangible normative sociology than the abstractions of ideology. In Fact in Fiction(1974), she describes two general categories of fact which may be revealed in fiction - specific information about the existence and nature of particular social institutions or customs and, more

importantly, "... information about values, norms and expectations in (the) society which may be inferred from the attitudes of the characters in fiction and their behaviour."[80] The case for this kind of inference is convincingly made through Rockwell's literary exemplars. Her social and psychological categories of normative influence (participation, personification and identification) are explored through fictional narrative, including poetry and drama as well as the novel, and the clearest demonstration of her views, perhaps, is the section on Negro slavery in America (pp.122-134), which begins:

> Consider the institution of Negro slavery in America. How do we know it ever existed? If we had no other evidence than the following group of fictional and personal accounts: the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass; Uncle Tom's Cabin; Huckleberry Finn;* various works of William Faulkner; *Gone with the Wind;* and the recent *Confessions of Nat Turner*, we would be in possession of a considerable body of factual information, despite the fact that these accounts are *all* biased one way or another and differ in origin in that they were written over a period of a hundred years by writers, black and white, male and female, living up and down the eastern seaboard from Maine to Mississippi. [81]

This "intrinsic method" depends on the same theory as that of Raymond Williams:

> ...literature neither 'reflects' nor 'arises from' society, but rather is an integral part of it and should be recognised as being as much so as any institution, the Family, for instance, or the State... ...Fiction, to be sure, is a social product; but it also 'produces' society, because it has a normative effect on its members...[82]

Attention to historical and social context in this thesis is, then, largely through the internal evidence of texts themselves and is also largely to do with feelings, beliefs, attitudes and values - the province of "structure of feeling". It should also be added that any poetry furnishes evidence of this kind ;

whereas the poetry of neo-classical pastoral writers or the English Georgians may provide an especially impressive kind of evidence because it is collective, evidence from the poetry of a writer belonging to no particular group is equally valid, since all writing begins in the ideologies of its own times. I would argue that in the case of poets like Ted Hughes and Edward Thomas, recognizable forms of dependence give way to a mastering (and, in Hughes, a manipulation) of ideology : the concept "structure of feeling" allows one to trace such processes, as I have tried to in this thesis.

(vii) The historical scope of this study

I have stressed by debt to the work of Raymond Williams, especially to the concept of structure of feeling, because Williams has provided a general set of reference points for a consideration of literature's relationship to reality and a particular set of reference points for ideas about the natural and rural world within that relationship. The historical scope of my study is wide, especially in Chapter 1. I have looked there at the period 1600-1900 for two interrelated reasons: firstly, our current understanding of terms like "nature poetry" and "pastoral" was largely fixed during that period and secondly, the dominant culture of today is firmly based in the social struggles of those centuries. Particular social/aesthetic questions within nature and rural poetry (about nostalgia, sentimentality and escapism, for example) have a direct cultural continuity with contemporary forms of those questions. In dealing with the Twentieth Century, I have taken 1945 as an arbitrary date separating the "contemporary" from the "modern". In the earlier period a highly ideological and mostly sterile kind of writing is set against the achievements of Hardy, Frost, Edward Thomas and Lawrence while the natural and rural poetry of the contemporary period is approached through a metaphysical/materialist polarity. (Particular claims are made for the poetry of MacDiarmid and Hughes: the existence of this polarity in the work of each of these poets is seen as a source of special interest and strength.) The question of response to change is taken throughout in an evaluative context: it is the use of sensitivity to change, the literary structure of feeling itself, that bears the closest scrutiny.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LITERARY TRADITION BEFORE THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

(i) A conservative cultural tradition

"Poetry of the natural and rural world" is a clumsy but unavoidable phrase, because this study is not just about nature poetry or country poetry but about the whole non-urban, non-industrial milieu. This is not differentiated at a general level precisely because of the importance of noting shifts and modulations within it. In this chapter, for example, pastoral is seen in the process of transformation into "rural realism", while a nature poetry of metaphysical enquiry, that will later settle on living things, is seen to emerge from landscape. I am not interested here simply in poems defined by certain subject matter, but in the underlying questions of my "Introduction" - how does social change affect literature? How much does a poet's awareness of change count? Are certain forms and conventions politically aligned? How can socially derived ways of experiencing and seeing be traced into poetry and with what effects? And so on. Poetry of the natural and rural world is a particularly sensitive indicator in respect of such questions; it is also a favourite area for dismissive and dogmatic judgements.

We are dealing, of course, with a specific cultural interaction. Were this study to be concerned with American poetry, we would link into a different set of determinants. Geoffrey Adkins, writing about the concept of nature in Bly, Snyder and Kinnell, comes to this conclusion:

> ... these poets form part of a radical movement in American poetry during the fifties and sixties in favour of the concept of the "natural self". This movement was inspired by the Vietnam war and the political and social climate of the twenty-year period which led up to it.[1]

British poetry of the same period is deprived of confidence in the self: often, a sense of self is absent altogether. When Adkins is discussing the wilderness in these American poets, he sees that

> ...its structure has a metaphorical relationship with the organisation of the individual. But in a second use, wilderness is a figure for the "repressed" parts of the individual. Exploitation of wilderness is paralleled by exploitation of the natural self. They are aligned as victims of the culture and at the same time as sources of its regeneration.[2]

Again, in a tradition with a literary manifestation traceable to Whitman, there appears to be a sphere of personal action, which British poetry has been unable to locate.[3] Our "beat" movement quickly subsided into the mere immaturity of the Liverpool poets and British poets of the old "movement" were self-effacing, not self-discovering. There was no regenerative wilderness to visit and anyway they preferred to look for a reasonable, ordered, cultured landscape.[4] With hindsight, it is easy to see the reformism of Larkin, Amis and Davie as incipient reaction.

Other writers, like Heaney, Hughes and Hill, perhaps sensing the difficulties of an American-style transformation of political into personal, have been able to take on the inert weight of British cultural tradition more squarely. "Nature", in this cultural tradition, has carried a dominant sense of regulation for several centuries. (Williams has remarked that "Nature, in the eighteenth century and nineteenth century, was often in effect personified as a constitutional lawyer".[5]) In the process of philosophical conservatism shifting into ways of looking at the social order of the countryside, this sense of regulation became heavily inscribed on the literary tradition. The tension between received attitudes and changing social realities reached

breaking-point in the eighteenth century, when poets came to recognise that their craft, equated now with pastoral, had lost its integrity.

(ii) The last successes of English pastoral

Pastoral involves a deliberate separation of literary convention from social reality. Since Theocritus and Virgil, certain qualities, peace, plenteousness, innocence, simplicity, freedom from emotional constraint, have been consciously associated with country life. These are held constant to enable other matters to be brought into focus - the nature of court manners and behaviour, for example, or, following Greg's "the very essence of the pastoral ideal is no more than 'love in vacuo'",[6] courtship and love. The country setting is incidental, though it may actually, like the trappings of the Masque, absorb the whole attention: in 1663, Pepys wrote that the popularity of Fletcher's The Faithful Shepherdess was "for the scenes' sake".[7] C S Lewis thought of pastoral as a region of the mind[8] and William Empson described "the pastoral process of putting the complex into the simple". He saw "the obscure tradition of pastoral"[9] eventually passing into Alice in Wonderland with the child, instead of the swain, as judge. Laurence Lerner, giving more attention to the emotion of pastoral (nostalgia) admitted a greater amount of escapist feeling:

> The wish to find in country life a relief from the problems of a sophisticated society formed itself, in Renaissance times, into a set of poetic conventions. These are the conventions of pastoral .[10]

In Shakespeare, Milton and Marvell, pastoral is handled with poise and ease. It is certainly not that they are unaware of social realities: Shakespeare's Corin in As You Like It explains

to Rosalind,

> But I am shepherd to another man,
> And do not shear the fleeces that I graze:
> My master is of churlish disposition ... (II.4.75-7)[11]

Ten years later, in The Winter's Tale, social reality and literary convention are fully complementary: in the long pastoral of Act IV Shakespeare combines the formal exchanges of lovers and courtiers (though even Perdita's garden is an ordinary English one full of practical herbs), with a quite different range of common experience and language. This is mostly centred on the clown, with his shopping-list of sugar, currants and rice and his humorous talk of wether tods and the price of wool and Autolycus, a cut-purse pedalling the trumpery of the day with parodies of contemporary ballads on his lips. There is a sense of pastoral serving the whole play, with no arresting indulgence or imbalance following from the form. In the yet more fantastic setting of The Tempest, Shakespeare has revolutionised the deepest structures and forms of pastoral. As in traditional fairy-tales, human conflicts and desires are thrown sharply into relief. Pastoral in Shakespeare, Marvell and Milton is deliberately chosen and exploited. The worlds of Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" , for example, are fully conscious idealisations combining classical lyricism and the flavours of English folk-lore. When day is dawning in "L'Allegro", Milton is creating the same mood that Shakespeare creates in the song "Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings" from Cymbeline:

> To hear the lark begin his flight
> And singing startle the dull night
> From his watch-towr in the skies,
> Till the dappled dawn doth rise;[12]

This sets the bounds to Milton's pastoral. A general movement then follows away from realistic detail (the cock strutting before his dames, the plowman whistling over the furrowed land) towards the obviously conventional. We move on from the singing milkmaid and the mower whetting his scythe to,

> And every shepherd tells his tale.[13]

There is no mystification about the "work" these shepherds do. The development continues with the eye catching new pleasures from the landscape around[14], finally leading to the cottage,

> Where Corydon and Thyrsis met
> Are at their savoury dinner set
> Of Herbs and other Country Messes,
> Which the neat-handed Phillis dresses;
> And then in haste her Bowr she leaves,
> With Thestylis to bind the Sheaves;[15]

This savoury dinner, like the work Thestylis does, is purely literary in no disparaging sense. No economic dream has insinuated itself. But what makes this pastoral exceptional is the breadth and control of its vision - seen, for example, in the Faery Mab lines (ll.105-114)with their unity with folk tradition[16]:

> Tells how the drudging Goblin swet,
> To ern his Cream-bowl duly set,
> When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,
> His shaddowy Flale hath thresht the Corn
> That ten day-labourers could not end,
> Then lies him down the Lubbar Fend,
> And stretcht out all the Chimney's length
> Basks at the fire his hairy strength;
> And Crop-full out of dores he flings,[17]
> Ere the first Cock his Mattin rings.

Shakespeare has the same ability to share and use folk-lore. Both writers, though economically separated from country life, have this as an important source of "inside" experience. Finally, the famous couplet:

> Or sweetest Shakespear fancys childe
> Warble his native Wood-notes wilde.[18]

seems to epitomise the sophistication of Milton's pastoral, in which the language of the convention becomes the imagery of the emotions.

What we discover in Shakespeare and Milton is a source of creativity deeper than the charms of setting. Pastoral is instinctively understood as a form of complexity, not a reduction of it.[19]

According to this view of pastoral, Marvell's poetry is a striking achievement. The social disruption of the second part of the seventeenth century places a particular burden on images of rural stability with their built-in conservative tendency,[20] and such images are central to Marvell. D M Friedman admits that Marvell turns to the pastoral mode when he wishes "to pay homage to the deep-rooted creativity of traditions and institutions which link man and the outside world in a fruitful harmony"[21], but Raymond Williams discerns a fine expression of tensions in Marvell.[22] He characterises "Upon Appleton House" as a transitional country-house poem which honestly meets and tries to justify the Fairfax dispossession of a religious order, while the sections on the working landscape and the retreat into the wood have an awareness that clearly goes beyond the economic mystification Williams finds elsewhere in seventeenth century poetry. Marvell writes dialectically. His historical determinism in An Horatian Ode, for instance, is not nostalgic, but philosophical:

> 'Tis madness to resist or blame
> The force of angry Heaven's flame;[23]

But Heaven's power on earth itself obeys natural laws. "Ancient rights" hold or break "as men are strong or weak":

> Nature, that hateth emptiness,
> Allows of penetration less,
> And therefore must make room
> Where greater spirits come. [24]

This characteristic appreciation of the tension between ideal and reality allows Marvell to write pastoral which is, like Milton's and Shakespeare's, a vehicle of expression rather than a subject: the crisis of conscience of pastoral does not arise.

The uses of pastoral in Marvell are religious and philosophical. When Donald Friedman discusses the importance of the garden figure in Marvell, he points out its various functions as

> an emblem of a legendary time when man and the created world existed in unexamined harmony, or as a figure for the spiritual perfection to be sought for in the contemplative life and to be found in a reunion with Christ that would erase the marks of mental decay that resulted from the Fall . [25]

In "The Garden", the sources of spiritual regeneration [26] and the relationship of mind and knowledge to the material world become the subject of the pastoral [27]. Though the retreat from passion is strongly felt throughout the poem, the similarities to conventional poems of social retirement, expressing loosely-connected sentiments of moderation, disappear rapidly after the first two verses. Ll.513 exemplify the philosophical trend of the poem's metaphorical nature:

> Casting the body's vest aside,
> My soul into the boughs does glide;
> There, like a bird, it sits and sings ... [28]

Yet Marvell, like Shakespeare in the allegorical garden scene of Richard II (III.4), easily moves back to the social base of the poem:

> How well the skilful Gard'ner drew
> Of flowers and herbs this dial new; [29]

The social patterns behind the beauties of the garden are held artificially constant but not misrepresented.

(iii) Pastoral in collapse

Elsewhere in seventeenth century writing, the fantasy life glimpsed in pastoral begins to merge with real social attitudes - a degenerating literary structure of feeling is read back into life. William Empson has described how such shifts towards harmonising the conflicts of reality occur:

> The essential trick of the old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor, was to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everybody) in learned and fashionable language (so that you wrote about the best subject in the best way). From seeing the two sorts of people combined like this you thought better of both; the best parts of both were used. The effect was in some degree to combine in the reader or author the merits of the two sorts; he was made to mirror in himself more completely the effective elements of the society he lived in. [30]

For Raymond Williams, the damage is done by pastoral's separation from a firm, social base. In Classical pastoral he finds "almost invariably a tension with other kinds of experience", while "the achievement, if it can be called that, of the Renaissance adaptation of just these classical modes is that, step by step, these living tensions are excised, until there is nothing counter-vailing and selected images stand as themselves: not in a living but in an enamelled world". [31] The controversial part of the argument comes in Williams's discussion of Jonson, Carew and Herrick. John Bull sees his criticisms as simple historical hind-sight,

> such an approach ... would require, amongst other things, that a reading of Marx was a part of the expected education of any Cavalier gentleman with aspirations. [32]

But Williams's main point is that the poems he considers are essentially very skilful "social compliments". The apparently strong ideas of "natural order" are in fact contradictory:

their effect comes from equivocal wit and this means that a limit on what/poems can achieve is imposed by their underlying structure of feeling. Williams's criticism of Herrick's "A Thanksgiving" is muddled for John Bull by Williams's personal testimony[33], yet to argue that the poem suffers because of the poet's "play at abasement, putting himself even lower than the porch and being so pleased about,[34] (i.e. through a structure of feeling unsatisfactorily absorbed and recreated) is not to deal in hind-sight. It is surely fair to hold, for example, that Shakespeare's structure of feeling in Henry V makes it less profound than Richard II or Henry IV (i) and (ii).[35] This is not to deny the possibility of heroic literature, but after those earlier histories, even Shakespeare cannot write the Williams scenes and convince us that he has truly incorporated the militaristic structure of feeling into his imagination.

To summarise, Raymond Williams's idea about pastoral literature[36] is that one can see "the conversion of conventional pastoral into a localised dream and then, increasingly, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, into what can be offered as a description and thence an idealisation of actual English country life and its social and economic relations".[37] I now want to trace the fate of pastoral in the eighteenth century, looking particularly at Thomson, Goldsmith and Crabbe.

Pope, in 1704, precedes his "Spring: The First Pastoral, or Damon" with a quotation from Dryden:

> My next desire is, void of care and strife,
> To lead a soft, secure, inglorious life -
> A country cottage near a crystal flood,[38]
> A winding valley and a lofty wood.

and Pomfret's "The Choice" (1700) begins,

> If Heav'n the Grateful Liberty wou'd give,
> That I might Chuse my Method how to Live,
> And all those Hours, propitious Fate should lend,
> In blissful Ease, and Satisfaction spend:
> Near some fair Town, I'd have a private Seat,
> Built Uniform, not Little, nor too Great: [39]

Rural poetry in the eighteenth century shows a growing interest in this old retirement idea, at a time when fresh waves of enclosure were taking place.[40] In this new phase of agrarian capitalism, signs of the labour force were tidied away from the parklands and landscapes of the country-houses. In these circumstances, the rural poet finds that new, unintended meanings are beginning to cluster around old words, and pastoral conventions are separating from social reality; a crisis of conscience about the correct use of pastoral begins to appear in the poetry. Most criticism of this poetry suggests in it a loss of balance, an inadequate response to the complexity of man's changing perceptions. Unimaginative sociological reporting is seen as one poetic extreme[41] and sentimentality or obscurantism as the other. It is not until the Romantics that its intellectual and imaginative scope is generally accepted as wide enough to produce great nature poetry, but the achievements of men like Thomson, Goldsmith and Crabbe, who sense complicated changes and struggle within the bounds of rational, social thinking, have their own considerable qualities.

George C Williams provides copious quotation[42] to demonstrate the general prevalence of the town/country contrast and the "retirement theme" in neo-classical poetry, but the early eighteenth century poem to have had the profoundest effect on country writing is Thomson's TheSeasons (1726-30). This long and varied poem expresses unresolved attitudes to the moral integrity of the economic system, attitudes which later in the century will nag for resolution in the very act of looking at nature and the countryside.

In Thompson's poem it is interesting to see expansive patriotic passages, catalogues of England's writers, statesmen and men of science, interspersed through the seasons of the year. Britain's "solid grandeur" is based on agricultural wealth. The hidden ideology is benevolent capitalism; social improvements and good wages depend on productivity and freedom is the free market:

> Heavens! what a goodly prospect spreads around,
> Of hills, and dales, and woods, and lawns, and spires,
> And glittering towns, and gilded streams, till all
> The stretching landscape into smoke decays!
> Happy Britannia! where, the Queen of Arts,
> Inspiring vigour, Liberty abroad
> Walks, unconfined, even to thy farthest cots,
> And scatters plenty with unsparing hand ...
>
> .... On every hand
> Thy villas shine. Thy country teems with wealth;
> And property assures it to the swain,
> Pleased and unwearied in his guarded toil.[43]
>
> ("Summer")

Not that Thomson will not rebuke the unreasonable employer. Like the far-seeing businessman of today who recognises the dangers of poverty and is careful not to cut his slice of profit too thick, Thomson knows charity as an investment as well as the dull prodding of the Christian conscience:

> Ye masters, then
> Be mindful of the rough laborious hand
> That sinks you soft in elegance and ease;
> Be mindful of those limbs in russet clad
> Whose toil to yours is warmth and graceful pride;
> And, O, be mindful of that sparing board
> Which covers yours with luxury profuse,
> Makes your glass sparkle, and your sense rejoice;
> Nor cruelly demand what the deep rains
> And all-involving winds have swept away![44]
>
> ("Autumn")

It was not for nothing that the author of "Rule Britannia" became Surveyor-General of the Leeward Islands at £300 pa, duties to be discharged by deputy, having written in "Autumn" of "the pure pleasures of the rural life" as free of the avarice of commerce:

> Let some, far-distant from their native soil,
> Urged on by want or harden'd avarice,[45]
> Find other lands beneath another sun.

The poem's successes often occur in its clearly pastoral passages. The account, in "Summer", of the "latent Damon", first spying on Musidora bathing and then rushing off to "guard" her haunt from "each licentious eye", has a fine lightness of humour and insight.[46] Humour is often an unexpected quality of the poem - sometimes as mild Scottish mock-heroic in telling the deeds of English sporting gentlemen, sometimes as whimsical renovation of poetic diction[47], as in this description of sheep, just washed before the shearing:

> Heavy and dripping, to the breezy brow
> Slow move the harmless race: where, as they spread
> Their swelling treasures to the sunny ray,
> Inly disturb'd, and wondering what this wild
> Outrageous tumult means, their loud complaints
> The country fill; and, toss'd from rock to rock,
> Incessant bleatings run around the hills.[48]
>
> ("Summer")

The Seasons achieved almost immediate popularity and ran to many editions, "Winter" going through three editions in its first year of publication. In addition to the congeniality of the economic and political views expressed, but not resolved, by the poem, there are two related aspects of its popularity which are relevant here, one concerning its placing of Man in Nature and the other, its aesthetics. The first aspect appears in these frequently-quoted lines from "Spring":

> Man superior walks
> Amid the glad creation, musing praise,
> And looking lively gratitude. [49]

Man stands on the earth, superior to the natural creation yet below the angels.[50] Thomson endorses the Deistic and Newtonian version of Nature, with an ordered universe obeying natural laws. The social microcosm too, is present in that last phrase of the quotation. The eighteenth century reverence for Nature as a source of religious knowledge and wisdom, and belief in the rational, controlling powers of Man are historical and highly conservative

commonplaces and Thomson embodies both in The Seasons.

The second aspect relates to a popular approach to eighteenth century landscape poetry - seeing it as reflecting the aesthetics of landscape painting.[51] John Dyer, who had been a landscape painter, describes the opening up of the view as he climbs "Grongar Hill" (1726):

> Now I gain the Mountain's Brow,
> What a Landskip lies below!

Towards the end of the poem, the morality of retirement adds its mellow tone to the song of the wanton Zephir, the murmuring of waters and the music of the birds:

> O may I with myself agree,
> And never covet what I see:
> Content me with an humble Shade,
> My Passions tam'd, my Wishes laid. [52]

The moralised landscape poem is inevitably conservative. The reader is invited to see the order of things as they have become and to be satisfied. The pressure is on the Whig to abandon his bustling activity, not on the Tory squire to relinquish his land.

If there is a conservative slant built into the traditions of landscape, it is surely there in the leisured inclination to view in the first place:

> When a sensitive 18th century gentleman went for a walk in the English countryside and came to a picturesque view, he turned away to contemplate its reflection in a blackened convex mirror which reduced the rawness of the light and gave the scene the mellowness of a painting by Claude. [53]

John Barrell gives an excellent example of the way Thomson's approach to landscape influenced, or coincided with, that of the literate public:

> in a novel by Susanna Harvey Keir, The History of Miss Greville (1787) the heroine, out walking, comes to "a height commanding one of the grandest prospects" she had ever beheld, and immediately takes out her pocket volume of Thomson - who would go for a walk without one? and finds in it "a lively description of the whole surrounding scenery", [54]

But for Barrell, Thomson's distinctive quality is to impose a structure on a view; the landscape resists through its own recalcitrant energy and this gives a sense of particularity and tension to his poetry. The case rests on an examination of Thomson's syntax:

> The crux of Thomson's method was, as we have seen (pp 6-7), the energy of his syntax, arising as it does from the sense he communicates to us, that the landscapes he is trying to organise can challenge and, to some extent, resist his desire to organise them. It is possible to argue that in expressing this idea of nature, that it is hostile to man and must be subdued, Thomson was using the pastoral to express a radically different attitude to nature from that which it had previously expressed. (i.e. the "aristocratic and pastoral" idea of Nature in harmony with Man, naturally bringing forth abundance.) 55

But in all Thomson's landscape-formula writing, it is the author's first-hand experience of nature[56] and simple representation of it that is his most enduring quality. It was for this anti-artificiality and anti-literariness that Joseph Warton praised Thomson, using much the same terms as Johnson's when he praised Shakespeare for holding a mirror up to Nature;

> Theocritus is indeed the great store-house of pastoral description; and every succeeding painter of rural beauty (except Thomson in his Seasons) hath copied his images from him, without ever looking abroad into the face of nature themselves. [57]

At its most direct, this particularity of description is so like Clare that it is easy to understand his appreciation of Thomson. Here, Thomson is describing a redbreast becoming tame in hard weather:

> then, hopping o'er the floor,
> Eyes all the smiling family askance,
> And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is;
> Till more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
> Attract his slender feet. [58]
>
> ("Winter")

Thomson's particularity, whether in observation or response to the active nature of landscape, partially counters the rather passive, conservative drift of the poetics of the picturesque.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, poems by Goldsmith and Crabbe force the reader to consider how the pastoral mode is to co-exist with the social realities of rural life. Goldsmith's poem "The Deserted Village" (1770) goes half way towards Crabbe: enclosure results in the destruction of community and the poet means us to respond to this as an actual social evil. Goldsmith's letter of dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds at the beginning of the poem makes it clear that he is writing a polemical verse-pamphlet:

> I have taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege ... [59]

Contemporary reviewers disagreed with Goldsmith about rural depopulation and its causes but they praised the poem itself. John Hawkesworth concluded that "as a picture of fancy" the poem had "great beauty".[60] It is the beauty of the poem, of course, along with its origins in the poet's nostalgia for the perfect rural harmony of his childhood memory and his desire for an unchanged place of retirement, that made it such a popular work. But, bearing in mind the reasons I suggested for the popularity of Thomson's Seasons (see above, p51ff), popularity may well seem an unlikely condition for a poem of rural realism.

The actual social order of the village as Goldsmith remembers it reveals familiar characteristics: Thomson's readers would have recognised and approved of the self-contained economy, uncorrupted by the desire for those luxuries that lead to trade and its accompanying ills. Social relations, unthreatened by scarcity, are fixed forever. The independent "bold peasantry" gives the

village its identity and, in the absence of great land-owners, the only other social group is made up of book-learned mandarins who need their village audience:

> I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
> Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill ...
> (The poet himself)
> While words of learned length and thund'ring sound
> Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around ...
> (The schoolmaster)
> Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway
> And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray ...
> (The parson) [61]

Goldsmith is disingenuous and there is naturally a kind of charm in this, but the indulgence of harmless vanities and the feebleness of this kind of "wisdom" (apart from its arrogance) weaken the whole structure of feeling of the poem. The social power of the great land-owner, one suspects, is as dangerous to Goldsmith's oligarchy of wise men, as destructive commercial power. Mere historical hind-sight would want to expose the inconsistencies of Goldsmith's ideology, but there is also a literary-critical relationship between this ideology and the sentimentality and lack of complexity of the verse. Yet within the weakness of its total vision, the poem has some sharpness in its evocation of the vivacity of the old Auburn community and the desolation of its present state. Goldsmith is also able to realise the inevitability of the fate of the dispossessed villagers; this inevitability becomes a structural quality of the poem which does much to enliven the assumptions about rural virtue and the neatness of Goldsmith's didacticism. In one sense, Crabbe's poem "The Village" (1783) finally explodes the notion that the pastoral and real rural life can be brought together, as Goldsmith's veiled Toryism attempts to bring them together. Yet if Crabbe's poem is one pole that persists in rural poetry right into our

own day, the other is Goldsmith's and John Clare's celebration of rural community. Without John Clare's Helpston it is true that this celebration would have little credibility, but while Clare is joining in, Goldsmith is watching and meditating. It is significant that Goldsmith should have attempted to fulfil this role, because the experience of separation has been a recurrent problem for rural poets and readers since he wrote.

In Crabbe, the question is no longer about containing a harsh reality within a pastoral convention. Crabbe faces the crisis by taking sides. He hangs onto nothing and dispenses with tainted poetic compromise:

> Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains
> Because the Muses never knew their pains:
> .....
> By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,
> As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not:
> .....
> No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain,
> But own the Village life a life of pain. [62]

Any nature or rural poet writing after Crabbe must take account of this point, yet as Crabbe is himself writing in verse, the point should also be seen as polemic in its historical context. This polemic (in the cold certainty of his use of the satirical couplet) is Crabbe's greatest contribution to rural poetry. But the voice of indignation is not evenly used. In the abstract and for character-types it works well, but the general dissolution described in the second book of "The Village" inevitably comes to rely on special pleading. This is less satisfactory still when Crabbe turns from the all-corrupting effects of poverty to a blanket explanation located in human nature. He adds the reason that he makes "the poor as guilty as the great":

> So shall the man of power and pleasure see,
> In his own slave as vile a wretch as he. [63]

The urge to solve limits the imaginative scope. It is not that eighteenth century humanitarianism, lacking a dynamic social dimension, ought to have miraculously found an alternative to this moral over-view that blurs the differences between rich and poor. The fault is in the frame of reference set up by Crabbe. His statements in the early part of the poem have that strength of indignation I was describing:

> Where Plenty smiles - alas! She smiles for few -
> And those who taste not, yet behold her store,
> Are as the slaves that dig the golden ore, -
> The wealth around them makes them doubly poor.[64]

Yet this strength is finally under-cut by the poet himself, for the power of his own best perceptions relies on a refusal to dispose of the particularities of suffering by reference to any generalised scheme, platitudinous or not; the poem (and its protest) can only be weakened when Crabbe makes such a disposal himself.[65]

The successes and failures of Crabbe and Goldsmith are especially relevant to modern rural poetry which, not unreasonably, criticism tends to judge against contemporary experience. We can see that Goldsmith and Crabbe are at their best when serving their causes, which means finding forms and language appropriate to their clearest feelings rather than trying to deal in complete solutions. They give most when tabling their experience and using their expressive voice.[66]

(iv) The realism of Clare

Through cultivation of this expressive voice, John Clare (1793-1864) avoided becoming a minor Romantic[67] and became instead a fine poet of nature and rural realism. His trust of the personal and local, while bringing charges of thinness, gives great strength to the structure of feeling in his work.

In Clare, sensitivity to change and the imaginative use of this in poetry is seen to be individual and undogmatic, for the traditional version of Clare (an authentic voice speaking for the organic rural community destroyed by enclosure) must now be modified. John Barrell, having studied the land-tax assessments and census returns for Helpston, finds that the enclosure of Helpston did not reduce the number of small owner-occupiers, nor is there evidence that some of them lost their strips of land. Furthermore, after the enclosure there was actually a population drift into Helpston. These findings, while pointing to the need to study the effects of particular enclosures before making economic assumptions, are in line with the "optimistic" views on the Agricultural Revolution in the work of historians like J D Chambers and G Mingay.[68] As Barrell recognises, the tendency of literary critics to rely on J L and Barbara Hammond's The Village Labourer (1911) must be corrected - "a book which, for all its virtues, does offer an unusually one-sided account of the economic effects of parliamentary enclosure and has a habit of presenting the exceptional case as the general one".[69] But Barrell also recognises the support Clare gives tc the Hammonds' view, for Clare "is concerned with the new social situation of the poor after the enclosure, and not with how much better or worse off they have become".[70] At this point Clare's own emotional

recollections merge with his social sympathy: the experiences of his Helpston childhood and his boyhood love for Mary Joyce are as finally lost as the open heaths and their associated social patterns. The feelings are fused in Clare's imagination, which may seem to weaken his protest, but because Clare does not pin his protest down to single causes or try to solve what he expresses, the protest cannot be set aside by argument. It has been recreated imaginatively. Poems like "The Flitting" and "Decay" fully accept purely personal loss:

> I walk adown the narrow lane
> The nightingale is singing low
> But like to me she seems at loss
> For Royce Wood and its shielding bough [71]
>
> "The Flitting"

> The stream it is a naked stream
> Where we on Sundays used to ramble
> The sky hangs oer a broken dream
> The brambles dwindled to a bramble
> O poesy is on its wane
> I cannot find her haunts again. [72]
>
> "Decay"

Clare has not been diverted from his own emotional centre, no matter if mention of Royce Wood might be "reckond low and vulgar" by the standards of pastoral poetry.[73] The anger of "The Mores" ("Inclosure came and trampled on the grave/Of labours rights and left the poor a slave") is underpinned by Clare's acknowledgement of the subjective element, the faded "sweet vision of my boyish hours":

> But paths to freedom and to childhood dear [74]
> A board sticks up to notice "no road here".
>
> "The Mores"

Similarly, Clare can celebrate the dignity of the labourer, enjoy rural festivities and praise the traditional pastoral comforts (see the end of "January. A Winter's Day" in <u>The Shepherd's Calendar</u>[75]) yet none of this does anything but strengthen his rural realism:

The thresher dull as winter days
And lost to all that spring displays
Still mid his barn dust forcd to stand
Swings his frail round wi weary hand
While oer his head shades thickly creep
And hides the blinking owl asleep
And bats in cobweb corners bred
Sharing till night their murky bed
The sunshine trickles on the floor
Thro every crevice of the door
And makes his barn where shadows dwell
As irksome as a prisoner's cell [76]

I am not arguing that Clare is "balanced", that temperamentally he gives both sides of an argument, but I am saying that truth to his feelings, both personal and social, is Clare's basic standard. This is reflected chiefly in his language. He would not purify his Northamptonshire dialect for the benefit of his publisher and his public and though the modern reader may find this dialect a source of beauty in itself[77], Clare's use of it represents accuracy and particularity:

The foddering boy forgets his song
And silent goes wi folded arms
And croodling shepherds bend along
Crouching to the whizzing storms [78]

This exactness is naturally not confined to dialect:

As noontide frets its little thaw [79]

If Clare's language[80] indicates the integrity of his poetic feeling, it is not surprising to find that his sensibility is not divided into parts for countryman, writer and reader:

> for my part I love to look on nature with a poetic feeling which magnifys the pleasure ... 81

and,

> I always feel delighted when an object in nature brings up in one's mind an image of poetry that describes it from some favourite Author ...[82]

John Taylor, Clare's publisher, encouraged Clare to abandon this interchangeability of literature and life:

> I have often remarked that your Poetry is much the best when you are not describing common things, and if you would raise your Views generally, and speak of the Appearances of Nature each Month more philosophically (if I may say so) or with more Excitement, you would greatly improve these little poems; [83]

To argue against Taylor, to value Clare's most direct poetry and to hold that he makes the very best of his talent through truth to his feelings and preservation of his own structure of feeling, brings one round to the fallacious notion of unmediated Nature poetry.

Certainly, precise observation and exact expression are mutually dependent, and bad observation mars a nature poem, as Clare knew:

> the poets indulged in fancys but they did not wish that those matter of fact men the Naturalists shoud take them for facts upon their credit - What absurditys for a world that is said to get wiser and wiser every day.[84]

The ground-work must be at least as careful in nature poetry as in any other, but is is surely a mistake to see nature poetry as the same thing as natural history or biology as Laurence Lerner appears to,

> For if pastoral is an illusion there is a book to be written on it in a way that there is not, for instance, a book to be written on nature poetry. There are books to be written on Wordsworth and Frost certainly; but to write on nature poetry, unless one is to stick to descriptive literary history, is to write on nature. This means to enter political economy (What was the social function of Wordsworth's beggars?) or biology (Why <u>do</u> birds sing?); and this seems too vast, and too far from poetry to be feasible or useful. [85]

A poem "found" in a flora, to take an extreme example, using only the technical, latinate vocabulary of botany, would appear quite different when "found", marginally rearranged and reprinted, in a different context and manner by a poet. There is always, as in

photography, an organising imagination or process subject to context and structures of feeling at every level.

For Middleton Murry it is the emotion of love that effects the "alchemy" of life becoming literature:

> 'Frail brother of the morn' to a jetty snail is the tender cry of a passionate lover; there is a delicateness in the emotion expressed which not even Wordsworth could attain when he called upon the Lesser Celandine. It is love of this kind that gives true significance to the poetry of nature, for only by its alchemy can the thing seen become the symbol of the thing felt; washed by the magic tide of an overwhelming emotion, the object shines with a pure and lucid radiance, transformed from a cause to a symbol of delight, and thus no longer delighting the senses and the emotions alone, but the mind. [86]

Later, in the same essay, Murry significantly stresses that it is the <u>emotion</u> that is:

> hardly mediated at all. The poetic creation is instinctive and impulsive; the love is poured out, and the bird, the beast, the flower is made glorious. It is the very process which Stendahl described as <u>la cristallisation de l'amour</u>. [87]

For Robert Graves the answer lies in analogy:

> His obsession with Nature made him think of a poem as a living thing, rather than an artifact, or a slice cut from the cake of literature. [88]

Both critics are perceptive, for Clare's poems do enact his rapture or enthusiasm and do become "living things". The poems about particular animals and birds - the fern owl, sand martin, nightingale, crow, badger, marten, fox, hedgehog and hare, for example - are typical of Clare's technique. The Breughel-like rural landscapes are full of detail (like those of <u>The Shepherd's Calendar</u>), and man, in the vein continued by Henry Williamson and Ted Hughes, is interminably hostile to untamed creatures,

> And shepherd dogs are trained to hunt them out
> They hurl with savage force the stick and stone
> And no one cares and still the strife goes on. [89]

Yet the colour and variety are not haphazardly crowded in. It is the energy of the naturalist/countryman's response that is there, the perception of life inevitably counterbalanced by waste and destruction. In a poem on the badger, Clare begins with a detailed apprehension of the creature's rough beauty:

> With shaggy hide and sharp nose scrowed with black

Then he turns to the badger-baiting:

> The frighted women takes the boys away
> The blackguard laughs and hurrys on the fray
> He tries to reach the woods a awkard race
> But sticks and cudgels quickly stop the chase
> He turns agen and drives the noisey crowd ... [90]

Such poems maintain the charge of childhood perception in their adult expression. Clare's complete involvement with this charge at all times gives a freshness even to the conventional "hermit joy" he feels at seeing the sand martin:

> Thou hermit haunter of the lonely glen
> And common wild and heath the desolate face
> Of rude waste landscapes far away from men [91]

Clare's poetry is very much affected by historical context and by notions of man as a creature within nature, but it is also a poetry essentially rooted in a direct creative interchange with material nature. The poems "live" in a way that corresponds to this interchange.

To appreciate Clare's importance for modern nature and rural poetry, we need to summarise the two major impulses within this direct creative interchange with material nature. Both are related aspects of realism, the first arising from eighteenth century anti-pastoral and the second from the poetry of "accuracy" and "observation".

As realism, both aspects work from a fixed observation point within the text. Anti-pastoral aims to tell the truth suppressed by a convention: whether in the songs that conclude Love's Labour Lost or in Corin's speeches in As You Like It or in Crabbe's depiction of the real "life of pain" in "The Village", we are being told what it is really like to live in a particular place and at a particular time. The language and experience of ordinary men and women is under-pinned by a sense of basic justice. Though the solution may too often be seen in terms of sentimentalised conservatism, there is still a desire for change and a disposition to argue that change can come about. In Clare, the anti-pastoral of Crabbe and of the "labourer poets" in the tradition of Stephen Duck, Robert Bloomfield and others, modifies, as we have seen, into a subjectivised mode of rural realism but avoids the transition to Romanticism.[92] "Observation" and "accuracy", the stylistic adjuncts of anti-pastoral, are just as much a part of rural realism; for Clare they are the marks of basic professionalism and it is in his work, rather than Wordsworth's, that they are preserved. In describing a primrose for example, Clare's precision connects directly with the work of eighteenth century naturalists like Gilbert White of Selborne:

> With its little brimming eye
> And its crimp and curdled leaf ... [93]

Later, in the nineteenth century, Tennyson's "evolution" poems in In Memoriam (nos 53-55) continue this strand of scientific writing, though the poems also document a crucial theological divergence. Nature, formerly displaying God's design and expressing everywhere a moral purpose, now seems harsh, indifferent and ungodly. It is now opposed to religious feeling:

> Are God and Nature then at strife,
> That Nature lends such evil dreams? [94]

The separation in sensibility is visible, but Tennyson is interested in both elements: on one hand there is the language of spiritual crisis, the dramatic and apocalyptic vision of conflict and chaos, and on the other, the language of the new sciences. The contrast is between images of the moth "shrivel'd in a fruitless fire", or "Dragons of the prime/That tare each other in their slime" and the wondering reflections that draw on a different register of language:

> So careful of the type she seems
> So careless of the single life;

or,

> And finding that of fifty seeds
> She often brings but one to bear. [95]

It is only in recent poetry that close observation associated with classificatory and descriptive natural history has resurfaced. The works of Darwin and Huxley and the great Victorian geologists seemed to leave the poetry of naturalistic description far behind. Scientific vocabulary had rapidly become differentiated and it is not until the work of a modern poet like Jon Silkin that we find any sense of a general movement back towards unification: Silkin's "flower poems" use, unselfconsciously for the most part, botanical terms like "perforate", "sepals", "stigma", "stamens", "axial", "corolla", etc.[96] Hugh MacDiarmid, ahead of his time, made an outstanding, single-handed attempt to establish a fully materialist poetry (see Chapter IV below), but the specialisation of poetic language runs very deep and British poetry does not seem likely to experience any re-integration of vocabulary on the scale of the American Black Mountain movement.

(v) Wordsworth

Wordsworth's dominant and largely unfortunate influence on nature poetry illustrates some of the central problems of the genre. The simplistic idea that you can pull out from the texture of the poetry, Wordsworth's attitudes to Nature and his conclusions about its effects, is matched by the easy mythologising of rural life within British culture generally. Sub-Wordsworthian poetry conjures quick, appropriate thoughts and morals from the landscape or seeks to lull the reader into reverie with country moods, but the sub-title to "Michael" ("A Pastoral Poem") evinces Wordsworth's own sensitivity to the dangerous contradictions inherent in his subject matter. V G Kiernan is highly sceptical about the effect of Wordsworth's withdrawal into nature on the poet's actual social attitudes and awareness, but his view of the poetry the withdrawal produced is more complimentary:

> His innovation and what made him great then and gives him meaning now, was his attempt to trace interacting influences of Nature and society on man's being. He was not withdrawing to the countryside in order to shut his eyes to the human condition, like many 'Nature poets' before and since, but to seek a fresh comprehension of it. 97

Kiernan rightly points out the social aspects of Wordsworth's innovation, but it is essential too to take on the mystical processes constantly present in Wordsworth, the sense of negotiating or reaching out. It is not that Wordsworth wants an explicable, substitute theological order - rather the reverse, for this "metaphysical enquiry", in which the process, the creative interaction with nature is everything, is not reducible to the physical or any other imagined reality. This is the most complex and suggestive aspect of Wordsworth's influence and it constitutes a major reference point in my thesis. The active power of this

process was described in a famous passage by J S Mill:

> What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. [98]

The phrase "culture of the feelings" ought to sound remote and self-indulgent; instead it suggests the controlled growing and storing so typical of Wordsworth. In "I wondered lonely as a cloud";[99] for example, a perfectly regulated poem in which the lyrical impulse is caught and deepened while a sense of the joy of a moment plays against the frightening expanse of the mind, one is perhaps most struck by the conviction the poem carries of the spiritual power of "great creating Nature". Wordsworth seems to capture this feeling so frequently in his poems <u>because</u> of the underlying presence of life's pressures and compromises.[100] His imitators do fall into their beds of ease never to rise, dissipating as they do so the quality of the moment, but he gives a sense, always, of having weighed the moment before putting it into perfect balance in the setting of the poem. This almost physical understanding of the density of moments of time is complemented by a keen structural ability in contextualising them. The combination produces a dramatic mental experience, a sense of living process. These "moments" or "spots of time" seem to me to be crucial in nature poetry generally and in Wordsworth in particular. When Leavis argues against emphasising this quality in criticism of Wordsworth, he is checking the view that Wordsworth is primarily a mystic poet and is trying to "lay the stress again - where it ought to rest - on his essential sanity and normality".[101] Here is Leavis's reason for directing attention away from these "moments":

If these "moments" have any significance for the critic (whose business it is to define the significance of Wordsworth's poetry), it will be established, not by dwelling upon them, in the hope of exploring something that lies hidden behind their vagueness, but by holding firmly on to that sober verse in which they are presented.[102]

Yet earlier, holding that "he had, if not a philosophy, a wisdom to communicate"[103], Leavis argued convincingly that in certain passages, Wordsworth "produces the mood, feeling, or experience and at the same time, appears to be giving an explanation of it".[104] He went on to show how:

> By an innocently insidious trick Wordsworth, in this calm ruminative progression, will appear to be preoccupied with a scrupulous nicety of statement, with a judicial weighing of alternative possibilities, while actually making it more difficult to check the argument from which he will emerge, as it were inevitably, with a far from inevitable conclusion.[105]

In other words, Leavis was dealing with the same difficulty of explication that apparently the critic ought not to attempt on the "moments" passages. The traditional emphasis does not seem wrong to me and I believe that we should stress the movement, the culture of the feelings, that Wordsworth's technique and language bring about:

> ... the soul,
> Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
> Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
> Of possible sublimity ....[106]

In these lines, Wordsworth has caught a mental process attuned to a physical and spiritual, experience. Something similar happens in Coleridge, in "Frost at Midnight" for example, and more often than not it is Nature[107] that provides the "moment" of seeing into the life of things for both poets.[108] It is important to remind oneself that poetry responding so profoundly to imaginative experience does not simply emerge from inspirational or generalised emotion (another sub-Wordsworthian assumption). Coleridge put it thus:

> No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.[109]

And Wordsworth's belief in the creative imagination was underpinned by Hartley's psychological system of Associationism.[110]

If it is hard to credit that poetry actually depends on such unpromising material, we may remember the philosophical hypotheses of the Greeks or the Medieval Theory of Humours. Yeats's involvement with the occult and with deliberately anti-scientific, cyclical theories of history, is a striking, recent example. These ways of perceiving reality through mythologised theory and hypothesis, have to be converted into the communicative patterns of poetry. Without this imaginative conversion, we are left with a bare solution which we may or may not find convincing; and literature always has to convince. Shelley was not simply idealistic when he claimed that poetry "acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness".[111] The most partisan literature must still work beyond and above, as well as "at", consciousness, for if it is ever reducible to <u>mere</u> theory or argument it can be refuted by mere theory or argument. In this way Crabbe and Goldsmith's "committed poetry" actually suffered from under-commitment, for their solutions cut across the structure of feeling of their own protest.

The Romantics' contribution to the crisis of conscience and practice, faced by the eighteenth century country poets, was to shift the grounds of the argument.[112] The deeply humanitarian tenor of their "withdrawal" cleared an impasse in feeling, an impasse related to a growing sense of impotence and paralysis within social reality. Following the Romantics we may note a reciprocal process: their positive withdrawal became the

foundation of an escapist tradition, while developments in the analysis of social reality opened fresh approaches to social realism.

Imagination[113], in Wordsworth, comes to actually oppose solution. In Book VI of The Prelude he wrote:

> Imagination - here the Power so called
> Through sad incompetence of human speech,
> That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
> Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
> At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;[114]
> (ll. 525-529. 1850 text quoted here.)

It is the paradox of that "lost", used of creative power, that concerns me and I want to go on now to suggest that this is at the heart of Wordsworth's rural realism.

Raymond Williams sees human feeling in retrenchement when he turns to Wordsworth's confidence in Nature - "which at least at the beginning was also a broader, a more humane confidence in men".[115] Williams continues:

> The old Cumberland beggar, in the poem of that title, is a later version of the old man whom Crabbe had observed, but the change of viewpoint is remarkable. He is not now evidence of the lack of community - of the village as a life of pain. On the contrary, more truly separated from its life in any direct way, he concentrates in himself, in his actual vagrancy, the community and charity which are the promptings of nature. It is in giving to him fellow-feeling is kept alive ... Thus an essential isolation and silence and loneliness have become the only carriers of nature and community against the rigours, the cold abstinence, the selfish ease of ordinary society.[116]

So Wordsworth's figures become Man - humanity - affirming the coincidence of Nature's value and human value through the separation of these figures from society. Williams's account of "community" is curiously static here, almost like Bradley writing on Wordsworth:

> No poet is more emphatically the poet of community. A great part of his verse ... is dedicated to the affections of home and neighbourhood and country and to that soul of joy and love which links together all Nature's children and "steals from earth to man, from man to earth". [117]

We do not need a discourse on the relativity of "human nature" [118] so much as a closer look at the actual structure of feeling in the poem Raymond Williams discusses - "The Old Cumberland Beggar".

The beggar is good for the community:

> Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
> To tender offices and pensive thoughts. [119]

Wordsworth's neighbour who, "though pressed herself/By her own wants" sets aside every week "one unsparing handful "of meal and so "builds her hopes in heaven" is a precise illustration of New Testament teaching. [120] Yet Wordsworth does not argue the (still popular) obscenity that poverty provides opportunities for charity and so should not receive a community solution, for Wordsworth sees hypocritical social provision as making the beggar worse off than before:

> The political economists were about that time beginning their war upon mendicity in all its forms and, by implication, if not directly, on alms-giving also. This heartless process has been carried as far as it can go by the amended poor-law bill, though the inhumanity that prevails in this measure is somewhat disguised by the profession that one of its objects is to throw the poor upon the voluntary donations of their neighbours; that is, if rightly interpreted, to force them into a condition between relief in the Union poor-house, and alms robbed of their Christian grace and spirit, as being <u>forced</u> rather from the benevolent than given by them; while the avaricious and selfish and all in fact but the humane and charitable, are at liberty to keep all they possess from their distressed brethren. [121]

In spite of this refinement of sensibility in Wordsworth, it is undeniable that the structure of feeling (like Crabbe's in <u>The Village</u>) is Christian humanitarianism. But where Crabbe undercuts

the power of his own statement through intellectual disposal, Wordsworth's imagination keeps the feeling of the poem alive and open. Not only is there a fuller sense of the difficulty of the Christian solution; there is also that direct opposition of imagination to solution which is the strength of Wordsworth's rural realism. For the beggar is mysteriously perceived. Wordsworth first describes him scanning his scraps and fragments "with a fixed and serious look/Of idle computation" [122] and then lines 22-43 detail the magical effect he has on those he meets. When he walks, his eyes are kept to the ground:

> Instead of common and habitual sight
> Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,
> And the blue sky, one little span of earth
> Is all his prospect. Thus, from day to day,
> Bow-bent, his eyes for ever on the ground,
> He plies his weary journey; seeing still,
> And seldom knowing that he sees, some straw,
> Some scattered leaf, or marks which, in one track,
> The nails of cart or chariot-wheel have left
> Impressed on the white road - in the same line,
> At distance still the same. [123]

There is a powerfully created connection between his unknowing sight of those details in that "one little span of earth" and his innocence; his transparency of being, communicated by Wordsworth, is mystically derived:

> As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
> So in the eye of Nature let him die! [124]

Wordsworth seems to trust the Imagination's ability to approach the inexplicable. He finds direction when he admits he is lost and I take that living and dying "in the eye of Nature" to be such an admission.

For Wordsworth's most explicit treatment of Nature and Man, we must turn to "Lines, composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey" which is finally much more the creation of an emotion and the imitation of mental rhythms than an explanation.

J P Ward[125], discussing Wordsworth's solitaries as "marginal men", convincingly sees them as "questioning"society in Durkheim's sense and Williams points out how they act as preservers of community values, but I would still stress the need to oppose imagination to solution in considering these perplexing social misfits of Wordsworth. (It is <u>their</u> life and latent power, a reservoir resisting explanation, that actually preserves them in their experience of hardship and maintains the possibility of future change.)

"Resolution and Independence", for example, has a firm didactic line. Though beginning with dejection and its destruction of joy (in Coleridge's words: "I see, not feel how beautiful they are!"), a mood which numbs any force of logical solution, Wordsworth is soon seeing the leech-gatherer as "like a man from some far region sent,/To give me human strength, by apt admonishment".[126] But the example of the old man's perseverance gives way at the end of the poem first to a disquieting image of the leech-gatherer pacing "about the weary moors continually" and then, in the very moment of accepting the example, to a couplet of the strangest emotional flavour:

> I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
> In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.[127]

This is a crowing of the intellect: thinking of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor is plainly going to work in a mysterious, not simply explicable or ponderously moral way, on Wordsworth's dejection. There are historical explanations for the "freedom" of the leech-gatherer and other solitaries, but for Wordsworth, the freedom they represent is that of the Imagination. When Wordsworth refuses alms to two boys because he has just given to their mother, they reply:

"She has been dead, Sir, many a day." -
"Hush, boys! You're telling me a lie;
It was your Mother, as I say!"
And, in the twinkling of an eye,
"Come! Come!" cried one, and without more ado
Off to some play the joyous Vagrants flew! 128

The moralistic/rational dead-lock of the eighteenth century country poets has been broken and a source of life has been tapped. For Wordsworth, this is faithfulness to the full range of his own feelings.

Without seeming equivocal, I hope, I am saying that Wordsworth's Romantic response to social situation and change is to unblock channels of feeling and perception. I cannot see anything reactionary or mystifying in this achievement, which, though in the social context of our "round of ordinary intercourse", never attempts to fob off the experiences of hardship and difficulty. Instead of providing technical solutions falling far short of the perceived complexities, Wordsworth maintains an openness of creative response. This in itself is a striking illustration of sensitivity to change transformed into poetry. It is also profoundly respectful of human creativity and its potential to resist oppression.

A final aspect of Wordsworth should be noted because of its bearing on Twentieth Century nature poetry - it is his reinforcement of the idea of rural community as secure, and the city, or the world beyond the locality, as threatening, to family and village. One thinks of Wordsworth's abandoned and war-widowed wives and mothers and those parents of lost children, lost often to the temptations of the city, in poems like Book 1 of "The Excursion", "The Mad Mother", "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman", "Ruth", "Michael", "The Affliction of Margaret", "The Thorn" and "The Sailor's Mother". This easily sentimentalised theme was particularly

interesting to Hardy, Housman and a number of the Georgians.

In the chapters that follow on the Twentieth Century, I shall be using an important polarity: the materialist /metaphysical. The materialist pole owes much to rural realism and the break-up of pastoral; the metaphysical, to Wordsworth's development of a poetry of process and metaphysical enquiry, with its mysterious spots of time and conjunctures of significance. Among others, Hopkins, Lawrence, MacDiarmid and Hughes work with and against these polarities, for they find that in experience the metaphysical is concrete and the material is unfamiliar.

CHAPTER TWO

YEATS, HOUSMAN AND THE GEORGIANS

(i) A dead-end for poetry

At the end of the Nineteenth Century and in the first two decades of the Twentieth, British poetry, like the culture from which it came, seems to have been rummaging through the past in a desperate attempt to revitalise and renew itself. In Georgian poetry particularly, there is a naive enthusiasm, an earnest desire to use the best of accumulated tradition to squarely confront social and moral dissolution. Remedies, of course, must be personal: heroism and integrity, individually exercised, must be set up against the blundering masses, who are philistine and cowardly and in need of firm, courageous leadership. Only then will society be healthy and purposeful again: "Now God be thanked who has matched us with this hour!"

If this were just the tragic false consciousness of a few generations, unable to recognise the determining forces around them or what had actually happened and was happening to humanity under capitalism, I could refer to its stark documentation in the poetry of the period and pass on. But this consciousness is deeply dispersed through our culture, so that an essential refusal of human and social development is still very widely seen as the only political path open. Some literature, diagnosing every crisis, pin-pointing every contradiction and deflating every pretension, seems able to understand the situation intimately and produces a complex, highly satisfying artistic response. Early in the century, this literature came from the right: exact social observation and analysis was internally countered by an artistically inexpressible, reactionary ideology. Yeats, Eliot, Pound and

Lawrence delved ever deeper for forms and language to bear the strain of this combination.[1] They knew, though Lawrence became increasingly impatient about it, that to lay their social solutions on the line meant the absence of a readership, even the absence of a language in which to communicate their views.

Contemporary writers like Brenton, Hare and McGrath are engaged in formally similar developments, but from the left. More commonly, established writers are located within the liberal democratic conscience of the body politic: they try to reconcile and rationalise, generally using a "content-based"[2] mode. This literature, I would argue, in its vein of low-key modesty and irony that has replaced the old individualistic optimism, is attracted to essentially the same culturally-derived myths as the Georgians. Sceptical humanitarianism with rural correlatives, disguised and updated, as in the poetry of P J Kavanagh, for example, is part of the wider association of literary activity and political liberalism described by Donald Davie in Thomas Hardy and British Poetry (1972). When Davie claims that Hardy has been the chief influence on modern British poetry rather than Yeats (or Eliot or Pound), it is because of Hardy's scientific humanism and his determination to make practical sense of a "world of historical contingency". The concerns of modern British poetry, described as insular and trivial by critics like A Alvarez and Donald Hall[3], are seen by Davie as "an attempt to work out problems, especially social and political problems, which Hardy's poetry has posed for the twentieth century".[4] The difficulty here is not with political liberalism, which everyone from reactionary to revolutionary is actually living out in their daily experience, but with the operation of political liberalism as a structure of feeling in literature, for it is forever pulling back in alarm, fore-closing,

censoring and solving in the very regions where imaginative literature has the freedom to explore. Larkin's best work is certainly concerned with problems, but when he tries to "work out problems" we get only the concluding bathos of "High Windows":[5] in that poem, abolition of reality is the solution. Larkin always does work towards a resounding concluding verse, but in the conclusions of poems like "Mr Bleaney" and "An Arundel Tomb"[6] he re-states the tensions of the poem at a more profound level, which is very far from working them out.*

The poetry discussed in this chapter is of restricted literary interest, but relates closely to powerful ideas and images in our culture. In reproducing the dominant culture it turns away from sensitive observation of changing reality and in its imaginative effort it lays claim to a kind of realism through distorting and confusing the workings of literary conventions. In the early Yeats the "refusal of human and social development" is made in "imperially subjugated Ireland"[7] and Yeats has to hand "the resources of an <u>aristocratic</u> Romanticism long since moribund in bourgeois England - the idealised cavalier, ceremonious lineage of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy".[8] Yeats, of course, rapidly moved away from these resources but not before his example had given influential new life to post-Romantic effusiveness and withdrawal.

(ii) <u>Yeats - the Poetic Voice</u>

The emergence of Yeats's poetic voice is one of the most striking features of his Romanticism and of all the sources of influence on contemporary poets discussed in this chapter, it is the only one to have had a positive as well as a negative effect.

* See below p 169.

Most poetry following the Romantics fails to convey a sense of the poet's consciousness of self and imagination being extended through the unfolding of the poem, although it is this attempt to realise the self, and its poetic voice, that is the Romantic poets' most distinctive contribution. Such post-Romantic poetry, however accomplished artistically, draws attention to the lack of a speaking voice and to the accompanying separation of its subject-matter, as that appears in the poem, from its origins in the world. The result is a kind of de-contextualised pastoral which becomes the matter, rather than the setting, of the poem. We can see this in Robert Bridges' poem "There is a Hill Beside the Silver Thames" from Book II of The Shorter Poems (1890). The poet muses on possible figures for his riverside scene, an angler reading a book or a figure "in ancient fashioned smock", but the main idea of the poem is to celebrate a secret bower where "he that wishes solitude is safe" to bathe or lead his love. The tone of the final verse is confused, with its elaborate address and its vows to the vegetation. The poetic voice, which in the early verses seemed derived from eighteenth century landscape description, evaporates in aesthetic enthusiasm. The language is technically competent but actually covers an absence of identity. Phrases like "Silver Thames", "flowery thickets", "freshest foliage", "shades defile" and "guardian isle" act as a cover; Bridges is trying to shake the setting into participation, but the result is vague and vacuous rather than mysterious:

> Where is this bower beside the silver Thames?
> O pool and flowery thickets, hear my vow!
> O trees of freshest foliage and straight stems,
> No sharer of my secret I allow:
> Lest ere I come the while
> Strange feet your shades defile;
> Or lest the burly oarsman turn his prow
> Within your guardian isle.[9]

The achievement of Yeats is his rediscovery of the vitality of Romanticism, through finding his own poetic voice and through easing his subject matter from "decorative" back to "actual" relations. The mature poems stand as evidence of this achievement, but more remarkable is the influence of the voice. This is a combination of musicality and social significance, which, in its echoes, has some of the primitive power of the prophet or bard. It is confident and authoritative, its tone having been achieved through endless revision and meditation. To modern poetry, still romantic in its desire for realisation of the self and for social position and authority, it offers as much as the tones of The Wasteland.

We know, for example, that Hughes learnt Yeats's Collected Poems[10] by heart at Cambridge and I would attribute much of Hughes's verbal energy to the influence of Yeats, coming sometimes through Dylan Thomas. The search for an assured voice in the animal poems is partly philosophical, but owes a great deal too to the tone of certainty and the knowledge of social identity in the poems of Yeats. In Crow (1970), Hughes has achieved an authoritative and highly distinctive voice of his own.

For R S Thomas, working in the now de-centred material of Christianity, the struggle for a voice is harder. His usual concern is to articulate for the inarticulate, whether that be landscape or man and once more the bardic voice of Yeats is sought. In the following extract from "Memories" it is not only the rhythm of the phrase "innocent of books" that is Yeatsian: the underlying ambition of the poetic voice is for that romantic significance that Yeats was the last to achieve - the achievement of making a mask of the ego so that the whole range of the poet's private experience becomes current coin for his society:

Come, Iago, my friend, and let us stand together
Now in the time of the mild weather
Before the wind changes and the winter brings
The leprous frost to the fields, and I will sing
The land's praises, making articulate
Your strong feelings, your thoughts of no date,
Your secret learning, innocent of books.[11]

Larkin, we are told in the "Introduction" to the 1966 reprint of The North Ship, turned from Yeats to Hardy in 1946: "Waiting for Breakfast" was written a year later and "shows the Celtic fever abated ..."[12] Certainly Larkin's language, emotion and subject-matter have all radically altered in his next collection, The Less Deceived (1955), but the function of the poet and the weight and structure of his pronouncements have all been deeply absorbed from Yeats and appear now with great clarity. I have mentioned the particular structural importance of Larkin's concluding verses, when his language is often at its most Yeatsian, but it is in the desire to make himself into a moral and social force that he reminds me most strongly of Yeats. His sceptical humanism is always on the look-out for transcendence, as in "Church Going"[13] and "High Windows", while at the political level transcendence has become a style. In his language patterns too, Larkin retains the imprint of Yeats's voice - in the unexpected strength from the position of an adverb or a negative, the weight given to a demonstrative pronoun by its metrical position or the solidity of a sudden detail:

> For you would hardly care
> That you were less deceived, out on that bed.[14]

It is remarkable that the generally positive influence of Yeats's voice that I have been describing, only seems to have become available at a high level of poetic proficiency.

(iii) Yeats - post-Romantic themes

The pervasive mood of late post-Romantic poetry is pastoral enervation. At its worst it debases the themes of oblivion and imaginative trance that came from the Romantic poets through Tennyson (up to 1842) so that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century post-Romantic seeks a mere verbal spell. Wistfulness escapism match a disinclination to deal with contemporary experience, which is left to the aggressive plainness of other writers - Kipling, Newbolt, Watson, Noyes, Austin and Henley. Unfulfilled desires seem, contrary to the protestationsof the poetry, to be preferred, for out of them the poetry is spun. In Lionel Johnson's "To Morfydd" a firm identity for the poetic voice would destroy the delicate tone of generalised longing that Johnson is after:

> A voice on the winds,
> A voice by the waters,
> Wanders and cries
> Oh what are the winds
> And what are the waters,
> Mine are your eyes.[15]

This is the poetry of a Rhymer, a craftsman in poetic technique, whose aesthetics are clearly based on the attempt to distil beauty from language alone.

As John Harrison suggests, Yeats saw himself as a poet before he had a subject[16] and it is in this phase that Yeats gives the most powerful expression to aestheticism, though his greatest poetry follows later from realising its limitations.

The greatest difference between Yeats's poetry and the other poetry of the nineties is that Yeats is already developing the techniques of symbolism. Decadent "aesthetic" poetry keeps its emotions secret, hinting at feelings but never bringing them into focus. It avoids declaring its own identity, preferring instead a mysterious and privileged corporate identity involved with emotions

forbidden to outsiders and the appreciation of beauties denied to the uninitiated, whereas symbolism, in Edmund Wilson's words,

> may be defined as an attempt by carefully studied means - a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors - to communicate unique personal feelings.[17]

The tendency of symbolism is the opposite to that of aestheticism.

Compare Johnson's chorus in "To Morfydd",

> Oh what are the winds
> And what are the waters?
> Mine are your eyes.

with the chorus to Yeats' "The Stolen Child":

> Come away, O human child!
> To the waters and the wild
> With a faery, hand in hand,
> For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.[18]

Yeats himself with all the self-criticism of a developing writer is extremely harsh on this poem. In a letter to Katharine Tynan of 14 March 1888, he wrote that his own poetry was:

> almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world... The chorus to "The Stolen Child" sums it up - that it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge but of longing and complaint - the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope some day to alter that and write poetry of insight and knowledge.[19]

In spite of this one can discern a clear perception in Yeats' s poem. Human life is sorrowful, but the enchantment of fairyland has undisclosed dangers. From details like "the stolen cherries" and the "unquiet Dreams" whispered into the ears of the trout a shadow is cast over the attractiveness of fairyland. The last verse sharpens the lines of this shadow. The familiar domestic comforts of human life, which soften the troubles of the element man was intended to live in, are seen to be forfeit when the child succumbs to the bewitching power of the fairies:

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest. [20]

The symbolist communication of unique personal feeling is already emerging. The sudden pang of loss in the last verse, admittedly intensified by Yeats' touching on the tradition of the vanished pastoral childhood, is achieved by concrete detail and poetic skill - the spreading of the word "warm[illegible]" throughout lines 3-5, the effect of a gradual soothing in the kettle's song and the apt natural detail of the brown mice "bobbing" round the oatmeal chest.

Yeats is usually sparing of precise detail and he rejects description. In "The Symbolism of Poetry" Yeats calls for a "casting out of descriptions of nature for the sake of nature".[21] The general atmosphere of "The Stolen Child", though, is that of the removed green world and it is this that imitators have absorbed, ignoring the total impact of the poem. However near Yeats comes to conventional nature themes (in "To a Squirrel at Kyle-Na-No" or "The Hawk", for example) he is invariably concerned with something beyond - the personal feeling to be symbolised. The wintry second verse of "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" veers towards a nature poet's theme, beloved of Hardy:

For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on
And all the rant's a mirror of my mood: [22]

Then, establishing the emblem of the swan in the third verse, Yeats leads up to the swan of the last verse drifting upon the darkening flood like "the last Romantics" in an age of dissolution.

In addition to the influence of this general "green" background to much of his poetry, especially his early poetry, Yeats carries

through two other important aspects of post-Romanticism into the Twentieth Century.

Most obviously, Yeats rejects modern science and the destructive effects of its application. Contact with nature and rural retreat become important themes in his work. In Auto-biographies he imagines a "mystical order" based on Castle Rock in Lough Key:

> All round it were the wooded and hilly shores - a place of great beauty. I believed that this castle could be hired for little money and I had long dreamed of a king, an Irish Eleusis or Samothrace. An obsession more constant than anything but my love itself was the need of mystical writing a retired system of evocation and meditation - to reunite the perception of the spirit, of the divine with natural beauty. I believed that instead of thinking of Judaea as holy we should (believe) our own land holy and most holy when most beautiful. Commerce and manufacture have made the world ugly. The death of pagan nature worship had robbed visible beauty of its inviolable sanctity and I was convinced that all lonely and lovely places were crowded with invisible beings and that it would be possible to communicate with them. I meant to interest young men and women in the worship which would unite the radical truths of Christianity with those of a more ancient world and to use the Castle Rock for these occasional retirements from the world. For years to come I was in my thoughts as in much of my writing to seek alone to bring again imaginative life in the old sacred places.[23]

The same desire to re-establish essential links with nature is seen in Yeats's essay "The Celtic Element in Literature" in which Yeats sees the modern way of looking at nature as "but friendly and pleasant, the way of people who have forgotten the ancient religion", for to Yeats literature must be "constantly flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times" or it "dwindles to a mere chronicle of circumstance, or passionless fantasies and passionless meditation ..."[24] He saw the Celtic movement as opening ways to the ancient passions and beliefs associated with ancient nature worship. In all of this Yeats looks backwards to the nature worship of Wordsworth and he also associates himself with

Stephen Spender's analysis of nature poetry:

> ... what is called nature poetry began with the industrialised era ... untouched nature became a spiritual value.[25]

(For Yeats, however, "environmental" poetry would be descriptive and so incomplete.) The full implications of this anti-modern trend in his thinking can only be realised by turning to the second reason for Yeats's importance to twentieth century rural and nature poetry - the social/political reason.

"Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland", Maud Gonne's favourite poem of Yeats , published in In the Seven Woods (1904), sets the figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan, symbolic of a liberated Ireland, in a wild Irish landscape full of memories of Celtic folklore. The natural imagery of old thorn trees, fierce wet winds, noisy clouds and flooded pools is correlated with the poem's stirring nationalistic themes. In fact Yeats's whole attempt to forge an Irish consciousness out of Ireland's legendary past relies heavily on the elements and the landscape of Ireland and its creatures. The political aspect of this is that right social relations, to Yeats, are those of the peasant and the "aristocrat as public servant". The human spirit and human relations are invariably ignoble and impoverished in the industrialised bourgeois world (as in "To a Wealthy Man" in Responsibilities, 1914). This feudal society is agrarian at base and Yeats, though bolstering his ideas with many references to the great families of the Italian Renaissance, has a number of poems celebrating an Irish country-house version of it. However outdated and impractical, it is not an indulgent society. In "Meditations in Time of Civil War", a sequence of seven poems acutely sensitive to the atmosphere and conflicts of the times, Yeats describes his own modest stake in this rural society in the section "My House":

> An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,
> A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,
> An acre of stony ground .....[26]

The whole political theory takes on a much more unthinking and sinister tone in "Hound Voice" in Last Poems (1936-1939). This poem is not just about women Yeats had known; it has an arrogant and restrictive structure of feeling about society in general that allows little more than self-dramatisation and the falsification of human capabilities. The medieval imagery is melodramatic and the diction of the last line aids in the general obscuring of the poet's voice - a rare thing in Yeats:

> Some day we shall get up before the dawn
> And find our ancient hounds before the door,
> And wide awake know that the hunt is on;
> Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,
> Then stumbling to the kill beside the shore;
> Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,
> And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds.[27] (Final verse)

Apart from indulgences like "Hound Voice", Yeats's political poetry has the awareness and complexity of Marvell's and it is sensitivity to change (whatever his personal view of it) that lends authority to his voice. "Hound Voice" gives the poet's own preferences their head, but "Ego Dominus Tuus" is much more characteristic of Yeats - "We are but critics, or but half create", and, "Art/ Is but a vision of reality".[28]

For Yeats the ideal of the feudal rural society seems to act as stimulus and metaphor (like his interest in the occult or automatic writing) but it is still significant that a poet of Yeats's influence should have given such prominence to an idea that has done little else but harm in British poetry for the last three hundred years. In my final comments on "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" from The Rose (1893), however, which is often taken to be indistinguishable from retreat poems of the 1890's and the Georgian period, I want to argue that Yeats is distinctive in his

control of the poem's artificiality and in the nascent symbolism of his technique.

Stephen Spender makes the charge of unreal social relations against the "false dream" of Innisfree: "It insidiously suggests that writing and reading the poem are a superior way of living".[29] I would argue that Yeats's Lake Isle though originating in an actual desire for a life "in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree"[30], quickly becomes a place of the imagination. Though Yeats came to dislike the conventional archaism "arise and go" and the last stanza's inversion[31], because of their distance from common syntax, the New Testament echoes are not incidental. I referred above to Yeats's association of retreat with primitive nature worship, but the language of "Innisfree" goes further than this. The descriptions of paradise in Revelation or in the medieval visionary poem The Pearl, for instance, have the same feeling of the weight of contemplation. The vision is only won by apprehension of its contrast on earth. Yeats's poem has a concentration which emerges by putting it beside these directionless stanzas from Arthur Symons's "By the Pool at the Third Rosses":

I heard the sighing of the reeds
In the grey pool in the green land,
The sea-wind in the long reeds sighing
Between the green hill and the sand.

I heard the sighing of the reeds
Day after day, night after night;
I heard the whirring wild ducks flying,
I saw the sea-gulls' wheeling flight.[32]

Half of these lines begin "I", but no feeling of meditation gathers around the persona as in Yeats's poem.

"Innisfree" is not about a way of living at all; nine bean rows and a hive for the honey bee are symbolic of simplicity, certainly, but more importantly they pre-empt irrelevant questions about the actuality of the island. The poem is really about peace

"dropping slow" into the heart's core while Yeats stands before a shop window "very homesick" in Fleet Street.[33] In this sense "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is directly descended from Wordsworth.

Harold Monro's "Lake Leman" may be taken as typical of a poem under Romantic and post-Romantic influence - of Keats and Wordsworth and Yeats's "Lake Isle" in particular. The traditional green mood is taken up, but the culture of the feelings is absolutely unachieved. The frame-work of a social daydream is substituted for the intellectual and emotional balance of its originals:

> Oft have I seen home-going peasants eyes
> Lit with the peace that emanates from thee.[34]

In "A Coat", from Responsibilities (1914) Yeats warns against foolish imitation of his early work. The poem ends:

> Song, let them take it,
> For there's more enterprise
> In walking naked.[35]

The isolation of the Celtic wilderness is deliberately exchanged for the isolation of the individual voice in society; to emphasise his chosen alienation as a Romantic poet, Yeats turned increasingly to misfits for his poetic masks. In contrast to Housman and the Georgian poets, he took up a series of positions from which vigorous social criticism could be made.

(iv) Housman's patria

It is, no doubt, somewhat misleading to label Housman a topographical poet but the simple celebration of native place becomes, as it were, a subject in its own right with Housman. Book I of The Prelude or Coleridge's "Sonnet to the River Otter" pay compliments as they pass on to other concerns, but in Housman the central feelings of the poetry settle on the actual names of

Wenlock, Ludlow and Bredon. Contemporary poets as diverse as Geoffrey Hill, Roy Fisher, Basil Bunting, Douglas Dunn and the Liverpool Poets all use the metaphor of place, as Housman does, but Housman's Shropshire, like Brooke's Granchester, has come to stand for a particular version of England. It is this sense of England in Housman that I feel to be the most important part of his influence on rural and nature poetry. Georgian poets clearly influenced by Housman in this way are Masefield (in the long narrative poems), Drinkwater, W H Davies and Brooke (see no 52 of A Shropshire Lad).

Stephen Spender uses the term "patria" for the ideal of a country realised in a writer's work[36] and it seems likely that Housman's "patria" in A Shropshire Lad represented particular popular feelings of 1914 and after. Certainly the sales of A Shropshire Lad, which were slow at first, boomed during World War I and then continued at a steady level[37], perhaps keeping abreast of the post-war fondness for the England that "went forever" in 1914. The idealisations in Housman's patria may have made him popular, but his influence on later poetry has been unfortunate, largely perhaps, because of his faulty and confused use of pastoral.

As pastoral, A Shropshire Lad can sidestep the issue of sensitivity to contemporary rural conditions, for in pastoral the rural world is accepted as a constant artificial background. The test is, rather, the pastoral's ability to investigate and express emotional complexities and for this the relationship between the poetic voice and its subject matter must be clearly conceived. There is also confusion in Housman's use of the convention of pastoral. He takes the familiar liberty of ignoring the conventional scope of pastoral when he sets up problems from the

real world (in the tradition of rural realism) and then "solves" them with what is only a simplified background.

In turning to Housman's treatment of the emotional complexities within his pastoral, a certain vagueness appears in the definition of his poetic voice and its relationship to the subject matter. Housman's vision is fatalistic and pessimistic and even the relief of his rural Shropshire is only a temporary respite granted by a harsh Nature:

> For nature, heartless, witless nature,
> Will neither care nor know
> What stranger's feet may find the meadow
> And trespass there and go,
> Nor ask amid the dews of morning
> If they are mine or no.[38]

The political counterpart of this nature is the nation that uses up its sons so that the species, signified by the queen, can continue:

> Get you the sons your fathers got
> And God will save the Queen.[39]

The irony is tentative: there is some ambivalence as though one must learn to like the bitter pill. The poem's flavour of loss wryly accepted recurs throughout the sequence, whether in connection with friends, beauty, love, youth, etc, and it is always presented enigmatically. In "The Carpenter's Son", in spite of a gesture towards the traditional interpretation of the Crucifixion ("the midmost hangs for love"), Christ's words of farewell to his friends are of the same puzzling kind as those of the other soldiers, lovers and criminals in A Shropshire Lad. The "I will die" of the last line suggests this half-welcome extended to death and loss:

> Comrades all, that stand and gaze,
> Walk henceforth in other ways;
> See my neck and save your own:
> Comrades all, leave ill alone.

Make some day a decent end,
Shrewder fellows than your friend.
Fare you well, for ill fare I:
Live, lads and I will die.[40]

This bitter-sweet flavour infiltrates the pastoral landscape, so that the pleasure and the reminders of its transience are intertwined.

On the idle hill of summer,
Sleepy with the flow of streams,
Far I hear the steady drummer
Drumming like the noise of dreams.[41]

Housman is usually concerned to express some aspect of this characteristic emotion. The form of the Greek elegy or the Border ballad serves to frame this emotion, but the poetic voice is uncertain, which in turn weakens the adopted form. In Number VII of A Shropshire Lad, for instance, the poem in which the blackbird sings a song of despair to the "young Yeomen", the persona is that of a ploughman:

When smoke stood up from Ludlow,
And mist blew off from Teme,
And blithe afield to plowing
Against the morning beam
I strode beside my team,[42]

The folk-culture exchange between man and talking beast is at variance with the feeling of the archaism "blithe afield" and the self-conscious "strode beside my team" and by the last verse, the credibility of the "ploughman voice" has been stretched too far. Even the rhythm is symptomatic of the poet's discomfort with his disguise, for the vigour of the ballad stanza seems overdone in the emotional loading of the fifth line. This line, rhyming with the fourth, often throws in a modern note of pathos or conscious effect which jars against, or takes too far, the feeling of directness and simplicity Housman is seeking in his ballad style:

I heard the tune he sang me,
And spied his yellow bill;
I picked a stone and aimed it
And threw it with a will:
Then the bird was still.

There are many poems, "The Lent Lily", for example, in which a similarly archaic diction and artificial action prevent Housman from finding an effective voice, but there are others in which the poetic voice is assured, like No II of A Shropshire Lad, the famous "Loveliest of Trees", In this poem, the delicate balance between joy and loss finds an appropriately light lyrical form:

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room ...[43]

The other main weakness in Housman's adoption of a quasi-pastoral mode concerns his way of setting up problems within the terms of rural realism and then dealing with them through the convention of pastoral. Simplifications and misrepresentations are the inevitable result. For Housman this means using rural Shropshire as an untested positive which evades becoming part of the literary structure and acts as deus ex machina for the poet. In Number XLI of A Shropshire Lad, for instance, sadness in the country is soon cured. The opening lines of lengthy pathetic fallacy explain how:

In my own shire, if I was sad,
Homely comforters I had:
The earth, because my heart was sore,
Sorrowed for the son she bore;
And standing hills, long to remain
Shared their short-lived comrade's pain,
And bound for the same bourn as I,
On every road I wandered by,
Trod beside me, close and dear,
The beautiful and death-struck year:[44]

The first stanza goes on to describe the comforts of the different seasons. In the second stanza, Housman turns to the conventional city/country contrast:

Yonder, lightening other loads,
The seasons range the country roads,
But here in London streets I ken
No such helpmates, only men;
And these are not in plight to bear,
If they would, another's care.
They have enough as 'tis: I see
In many an eye that measures me
The mortal sickness of a mind
Too unhappy to be kind.
Undone with misery, all they can
Is to hate their fellow man;
And till they drop they needs must still
Look at you and wish you ill.

The verse describes Arnold's "strange disease of modern life" in the rhythms and tone of Blake's "London".[45] Blake's "chartered Thames" and "mind-forg'd manacles" are part of an imaginative language symbolising the dehumanising and denaturing effects of the industrial city. The counterpart in Blake to Housman's pastoral first verse is not in "London", but in the "Preface" to Milton[46], a prophetic poem that places the pastoral memory of "England's green and pleasant land" against the image of "dark Satanic mills", as part of the action of a mental and spiritual war. Blake is using a pastoral metaphor, not nostalgia for some English Eden now vanished. Housman is plainly identifying the misery caused by industrial cities in his poem but unlike Blake he imagines a cure for social realities by bringing his pastoral landscape to life. As soon as the actual rural world is invoked as a solution to the desperate conditions of industrialised England, Housman's poem rapidly comes into focus: it is a poem deeply frightened of response, speaking more of the author's projections than of observation or imaginative sympathy. Most tellingly, it is merely the absence of the country and its "help-mates" the seasons, that is wrong.[47]

This structure of feeling, blundering through the subtle conventions of pastoral and quite inadequate to its subject, is common in Georgian rural poetry. Political relief is obtained

through falsification - through gilding the "patria", the idealised, old, lost, rural England, "the land of lost content".

Such a patria lies at the heart of Housman's work and influence. It is always available as a quick solution to difficulties. In "The Recruit"[48] the human difficulty concerns feelings about the men who march away. Shakespeare's recruiting scene in Henry IV, Part II, as near as Shakespeare got to social satire in its harsh comedy, is one of many explorations of this theme. The weakness of Housman's treatment of it is that he wants a particular emotional flavour without the human tensions. The ballad form itself encourages a stoical response to the human difficulty and then the tensions are cut away altogether to leave a simple nationalistic emotion. "Ludlow" repeated seven times in seven verses represents the values of a certain version of English rural life. It is stable and dependable and it expects every man to do his duty. Every time the name "Ludlow" sounds, one hears the sentiment of "There'll always be an England..."[49] Housman goes beyond nationalism to imperialism for he uses the recruit's way of life in a small English market town to challenge rival powers:

> And you will list the bugle
> That blows in lands of morn,
> And make the foes of England
> Be sorry you were born. [50]

In this poem, and in many others, Housman is using pastoral in the domain of rural realism, an example that most of the Georgians found all too easy to follow. The poet's distance from any sense of contemporary life in an agricultural community is accompanied by sentimental and politically loaded assumptions about the qualities of an idealised rural England. Such assumptions are frequently responsible for the feebleness of much twentieth-century nature and rural poetry.

(v) The Georgian Background

Three poets who were associated with the Georgian movement, Robert Frost, Edward Thomas and D H Lawrence, appear in my next chapter as positive influences on contemporary rural poetry. In comparison with their work, conventional Georgian structures of feeling seem derivative, restricted and reactionary, but the movement was significant because of its formal opposition to Modernism and, at a popular level, because it helped to fix and sustain notions, still current, about what "poetry" is - romantic, imprecise, rural, gentle, nostalgic.[51] Most disastrously, for British poets trying to use the natural or rural world seriously, "poetry" came to be identified with "nature poetry". Graham Hough has commented on the appeal of this amalgamation for "poets and poetically minded persons":

> There has probably been too much nature poetry in English since Wordsworth. A merely passive sense of natural beauty as a comforting, sustaining, more rarely an exciting influence, became too easy an indulgence for poets and poetically minded persons.[52]

Though nature poetry has never been without its weakly philosophical compositions, it is particularly suspect today because of the direction taken in the fifteen or twenty years from 1910. Apologists for the Georgians[53] have argued that the five volumes published by Marsh between 1912 and 1922[54] began promisingly and show only a gradual loss of vitality leading up to J C Squire's patronage of the Neo-Georgians of the Twenties through the pages of The London Mercury. But whatever poems of merit may be salvaged from the first few Georgian collections, it is clear that from the beginning nature poetry found itself in alliance with the traditional and conservative against the modern and experimental.

While Pound and the Imagists were looking to French poetry, Marsh's contributors seem to have been closer to A Shropshire Lad;

and while Pound and Eliot (for all Eliot's conclusion "that the division between Conservative Verse and vers libre does not exist, for there is only good verse, bad verse and chaos",[55]) were open to the idea of good verse quite possibly also being free verse, Marsh's taste, which was to be influential in forming popular ideas about poetry, remained more conventional, causing Lawrence to write to him in exasperation, "you are a bit of a policeman in poetry".[56] More importantly, Marsh was hostile to difficulty and obscurity and also to the notion of a wide-ranging sensibility that could make use of literature of different cultures and periods alongside its own direct experience. He preferred realistic narrative to the psychological narrative of free verse and formally constructed lyrics to the lyric in fragmented or collage style.

This technical conservatism became linked to the idea of "nature poetry" in the pre-1920 period, largely because the Georgian volumes were so dominated by the subject. Nearly two-thirds of the poems in Georgian Poetry I, for example, dealt specifically with nature and many others frequently used nature imagery. The late Georgians were christened "the Squirearchy" by Osbert Sitwell and he also referred to them as "the nature crew".[57] Also, this was the poetry most widely read (Marsh estimated that by 1939, Georgian Poetry 1 had sold 15,000 copies and Georgian Poetry II had sold 19,000).[58] There must have been temperamental links as well between Marsh's readers and certain attitudes of the Georgian volumes - the term "week-end" poets was widely used and accepted and suggests divisions into work and play, serious and entertaining which encourage art to be undemandingly recreational, easily comprehensible and pleasant. Indeed, the only major popular objection to Georgian Poetry I and II was on account of the

unnecessary realism and brutality in parts of Brooke, Abercrombie and Bottomley, the assumption being that life is painful enough without art adding to it.

The kind of rural poetry favoured by such a view of art is easy to anticipate and also associates itself naturally with a view of the country as a place of recovery and peace for the city-dweller. As the prime function of such poetry is to remind the reader of the countryside's pleasantness, it is particularly prone to a lack of imaginative seriousness and thoughtfulness. These might interfere with the dream of peace. Harold Monro's "Week-end" [59]

> is a fair summary of these attitudes. Perfectly reasonable as they may be in life, they form a very flimsy structure of feeling for poetry - particularly when they are imagined to hold hidden truths and values.

(vi) <u>Rural myths and country attitudes in Georgian poetry</u>

In the pages that follow I shall consider the main characteristics of Georgian poetry which bear on this study - the interest in rural escapism and its association with reaction, the conception of the poet as isolated observer, the myths about the "heart and soul" of rural England and the idea (mediated in natural imagery) of the physical and spiritual energy of those "most truly alive".

Nature is the staple source of imagery and subject-matter in the Georgian volumes, yet even here "pure" nature poetry is rare, W H Davies and John Freeman writing the only real poetry of this kind in the first three volumes. A mixture of pastoralism and rural realism is more usual among the Georgians. Robert Ross is strongly inclined to place most of the blame for the degeneration of the Georgian pastoral tradition on the post-war Neo-Georgians, but Squire, Freeman, Turner, Monro and Drinkwater were all well

represented in the early volumes and are largely responsible for establishing the character of the Georgian pastoral tradition. Though Neo-Georgians such as Shanks and Shove can be blamed for bringing rural and pastoral poetry still lower, one should remember that positive contributions were made by Sassoon, Blunden and Lawrence in the post-war volumes. In addition, though most of the criticism of Georgian nature poetry was to come later from Eliot, Huxley and the Sitwells and later still from Leavis, Ross himself points out that:

> As early as 1913 Richard Aldington had taken several of the pre-war Georgians to task for their naïveté in supposing that good poetry could be created out of the mere facts of botanical germination, florescence and decay.[60]

In spite of Ross's reservations, he does speak of "the once fresh, vital Georgian nature lyric".[61] There are few enough poems that fit this description, though one would be "A Great Time" by Davies:

> Sweet Chance, that led my steps abroad,
> Beyond the town, where wild flowers grow -
> A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord,
> How rich and great the times are now!
> Know, all ye sheep
> And cows, that keep
> On staring that I stand so long
> In grass that's wet from heavy rain -
> A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
> May never come together again;
> May never come
> This side the tomb.[62]

The cows and sheep (and Georgian sheep, in Edith Sitwell's description of them with their dreamy plaster faces, "Alexandra fringes and eyes like the eyes of minor German royalty",[63] were frequently ridiculed as typical of the Georgian scene) are used whimsically and carefully by Davies, the good humour being a measure of his content and a fine accompaniment to the poem's serious conclusion. The lyric's vitality and freshness come from

its expression of the moment of "sweet chance", Davies senses the mystical quality of special moments in nature ("a rainbow and a cuckoo's song") and these are integrated with the poet's own state of heightened awareness[64] ("may never come/This side the tomb"). Yet even "A Great Time" is the poem glanced at by Eliot in his criticisms of the Georgians as caressing everything they touch, for, claiming that there were two varieties of Georgian "pleasantness", he distinguished one as "insidiously didactic" and Wordsworthian adding, in parentheses, "a rainbow and a cuckoo's song".[65] In a way reminiscent of, but quite different to, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Davies expresses the delight and energy of Nature. Certainly he often uses the conventional tricks of the Nature lyricist (the contrast between his mental state and Nature outside, the mind's ability to recreate from memory, the recurrence or endurance of natural beauty, etc), but Davies is also capable of a freshness of perception about familiar subjects, which makes him, among a multitude of "nature lovers" with a desire to enshrine their enjoyment of nature in verse, an original "nature poet":

> A butterfly - from who knows where -
> Comes with a stagger through the air,
> And, lying down, doth ope and close
> His wings, as babies work their toes:
> Perhaps he thinks of pressing tight
> Into his wings a little light![66]

John Freeman never achieves this quality. Two of his poems in GP III, separated by a lyrical personification of Beauty, demonstrate the limitations of so much Georgian poetry. "November Skies",[67] nineteen lines long, has "no sky lovelier", "that loveliness" and "the loveliest", while the poem "It was the lovely moon",[68] has the same limitation of vocabulary and imagination: "lovely moon" occurs three times, not counting its appearance in the title, and then a fourth time in the final phrase, "lovely, thoughtful moon" - all within seventeen lines, two of which are:

"Faintly, faintlier afar". It is this kind of laboured, adjectival emotion in lieu of precision, that Imagism set out to cure.[69]

Apart from D H Lawrence, Edmund Blunden is the only other Georgian to write successful nature poetry though of his six contributions to GPV, four of which were also in The Shepherd (1922) none are, strictly speaking, nature lyrics. One of these, however, "The Giant Puffball",[70] indicates a successful direction for nature poetry. This poem makes a highly effective leap of the imagination: the rather curious, sometimes archaic diction gives the puffball a voice reminiscent of the giants and ogres of allegory and it is remarkable how Blunden draws out the reader's sympathy without a touch of sentimentality.

Blunden's more usual subject is the pastoral world of The Shepherd. Though this collection is somewhat haunted by recollections of his war experience, later poems like "The Midnight Skaters" and "October Comes" convey a sense of human uncertainty before the natural world which seems to lie even deeper than his recollections of "war's agony". The rural feeling of The Shepherd goes back through Clare to the eighteenth century. Poems like "Mole Catcher", "Water Sport" and "The Poor Man's Pig" (the last-mentioned poem was also in GP V) are written in the confident tone of the observer who is integrated with his surroundings. But, unlike Clare, Blunden does not have the resources or experience to sustain or develop this rural realism and, in many poems, "Forefathers" for instance, he is in the confused unrealistic relationship to rural life more typical of the Georgian poet.

Blunden's later poetry was, I feel, judged fairly by Leavis when he said that the "something satisfying about the dense richness of his pastoral world, with its giant puff-balls and other evocations

of animistic fancy instead of nymphs and naiads" was replaced later by "a serious instability in Mr Blunden's art".[71] Blunden's retreat into Arcadia increasingly favoured a kind of eighteenth-century meditative pastoral with its destructive insensitivity to surroundings. The poem "April Byeway" (which was in both The Shepherd and GP V) shows Blunden taking this calamitous direction. The way of fantasy taken in "The Giant Puffball", as Walter de la Mare knew too, avoids the problem of the social relationships of the poet's voice; but neither this nor the skilfully adopted tones of John Clare, satisfied Blunden. If, like the other Georgians, he finally preferred the voice of meditative pastoral, which automatically seems to limit the potential of rural poetry, maybe it was out of honesty about his actual relationship to the countryside. The disaster of this choice for poetry is that such honesty stops short of recognising the imaginative dishonesty of importing all the accompanying rural mystifications and rationalisations to transform the exhilaration of the tourist or week-ender into acceptably weighty poetic feeling.

According to Laura Riding and Robert Graves it was understood by the Georgians "that, in reaction to Victorianism, their verse should avoid all formally religious, philosophic or improving themes".[72] Graves's own "A Ballad of Nursery Rhyme" [73] says much the same thing. It attacks writers who try to throw "webs of ink" over the utmost ends of human thought, "till nothing's left to think". Nevertheless, the morals and philosophical themes are there in the nature poems of the Georgians; God is revealed in his creation and moral lessons are instilled through observing Nature. Poems of this kind, like Davies's "The Kingfisher" and Gibson's "Geraniums" in GP I or Francis Brett Young's "The Leaning Elm" in GP IV have their redeeming qualities, but not so Francis Ledwige's "A Rainy Day in April"

with Spring "hemming the woods and carpeting the wold ... the spinning world her wheel"[74] or Ralph Hodgson's "universal choir" of all creatures, including "mountains, moths and men" in "The Song of Honour"[75]. Such poems support Middleton Murry's claim that a Georgian idea "is not an idea at all, that it has been defaced, worn smooth by the rippling of innumerable minds".[76]

In place of ideas, much Georgian poetry has hidden ideologies and it is some of these, relating to the cult of vigour and energy, the theme of the poet's isolation and the Georgian "patria", that I want to examine now.

To Marsh, in his "Prefatory Note" to GP I, English poetry was "once again putting on a new strength and beauty" and it is the feeling of a new airiness and vigour that attracted D H Lawrence:

> ... we are awake again, our lungs are full of new air, our eyes of morning ... In almost every poem in the book comes this note of exultation after fear, the exultation in the vast freedom ...[77]

Throughout the Georgian anthologies there is a sense of spiritual and physical exultation and Nature is used to express it. It is an exultation in vigour and energy and at its crudest it becomes a simple cult of masculine athleticism glorying in the power of the body. In this it is not so different from those glorifications of physical power in imperialistic poems by Newbolt, Henley and Kipling. One does not have to have been made wary of all this by the Fascist adoption of it in the Twenties and Thirties. It is damning enough that it becomes an untested point of reference in so much poetry. My quotation from The Everlasting Mercy below shows clearly how the reader ought to feel if he is decent and clean-living himself. The same pressure is in the work of Gibson, Turner and Brooke. Abercrombie's "Witchcraft: New Style" carries the tradition into

GP IV and D H Lawrence too, temperamentally so attracted to it, not infrequently bullies his reader in the same manner.

This cult finds a champion in Vivian de Sola Pinto. Discussing two sonnets of Wilfred Scawen Blunt he finds that Blunt "achieves a synthesis of thought and passion which is Elizabethan rather than Victorian". Remembering the Renaissance aristocracy Pinto claims that Blunt is "the last considerable poet produced by that society"[78] for which poetry was a natural part of a gentleman's activities. In the sonnet sequence "To Esther" he finds "clean sensuality" and "enormous zest for life". All this is given little support by the poem Pinto quotes:

> Today, all day I rode upon the Down,
> With hounds and horsemen, a brave company.

The poem concludes with the poet riding after the quarry of his love's face:

> For it, I rode,
> My horse a thing of wings, myself a God.[79]

There is no synthesis of thought and passion here: we have instead the ancestor of many breezy Georgian poems about vigorous, solitary wanderers who live for the open air. Such poems seem inspired by envy of the active life (in reaction against the liberal intellectual's desk-bound condition) and by literary fantasies about the old heroic life of hunting and courtly pursuits. Reminiscences of Blunt's attitudes come through into Masefield's The Everlasting Mercy (1911) a tremendously popular piece of hyper-realism that appeared in the year before the first Georgian anthology. Kane, about to fight his poaching rival and one-time friend Billy Myers, looks round the ring and observes the physical opposite of Pinto's "clean sensuality":

The five and forty human faces
Inflamed by drink and going to races,
Faces of men who'd never been
Merry or true or live or clean;
Who'd never felt the boxer's trim
Of brain divinely knit to limb,
Nor felt the whole live body go
One tingling health from top to toe; [80]

The same sentiments recur throughout the Georgian volumes. Wholesomeness, beauty, health, strength and manly comradeship are opposed to coarseness, grossness and ugliness. Masefield's "Biography" in GP I describes talking all night with friends,

Till the dim room had mind and seemed to brood,
Binding our wills to mental brotherhood;
Till we became a college, and each night
Was discipline and manhood and delight; [81]

In Bottomley's "King Lear's Wife" in GP II, the alliance between these ideas of vigorous beauty and physical force becomes explicit. The physical force is declared as cruelty and the language attempts an unfeeling aestheticism to convey its beauty[82] - something also tried by Abercrombie in "The Sale of St Thomas" in GP I
In Bottomley's poem, Queen Hygd encourages Goneril (who likes to kill purely, to pierce a cony "eye to eye" yet leave it "untorn, unsullied, and with flawless fur" and not "to crush delicate things to bloody mash"), telling her it's human to recognise her nature's joys:

Live you your fill of a harsh purity .[83]

Brooke's pastoral England in "Granchester" in GP I is "where men with splendid hearts may go"[84] and his sonnet "Peace" shows that the exultation in his work is as flawed as Abercrombie!s or Bottomley's. Youth and energy can only be expressed in violence, and peace and love can only be known as corruption:

Now,God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love! [85]

Another example is the work of Gibson. In "The Hare"in GP I pp 93-105), when attracted to a gipsy girl, he sees "a fat man with dull eyes aleer" whom he wishes to send "spinning, 'mid the wheels/ And stop his leering grin with mud". [86] Gibson becomes totally absorbed in these Spartan thoughts in his verse-dialogue "Hoops" in GP II. Gentleman John, hating his own body for "the mis-stitched, gnarled and crooked thing" it is, has many pages in praise of "Firm flesh, and supple sinew, and lithe limb", and he explains that though he is only a camel-keeper (and the camels are vile and ugly too), he wants to be in the circus:

For in the circus-ring there's more delight
Of seemly bodies, goodly in sheer health,
Bodies trained and tuned to the perfect pitch,
Eager, blithe, debonair, from head to heel
Aglow and alive in every pulse, than elsewhere
In this machine-ridden land of grimy, glum
Round-shouldered, coughing mechanics. Once I lived
In London, in a slum called Paradise,
Sickened to see the greasy pavements crawling
With puny flabby babies, thick as maggots.
Poor brats! I'd soon go mad if I'd to live
In London, with its stunted men and women
But little better to look on than myself. [87]

This is in the mood of No XLI of A Shropshire Lad with a pastoral of the body added to the pastoral of place.

Sturge Moore's "A Sicilian Idyll" in GP I partly the story of Delphis (who "dreams not of the court, and city-life/ Is what he rails at") [88] is a parody even of Gibson.

Drinkwater, too, is swept into this rhetoric of mind and body with its longing for sacrificial ministrations sweet/Of man to man, and swift and holy loves,/And large heroic hopes ..." [89]

There is a pastoral setting for many of these poems, sometimes the classical Greek world (see, especially, W J Turner in GP III), but more usually the hero is conceived as a red-blooded adventurer whose morals and tastes are sanctioned by his energy and spontaneity. He sleeps rough, roams the countryside and is an intimidating prospect to man and beast, and sometimes women too. Gibson, in "The Hare", has an elaborate dream-symbolism, full of sexual fears, which shows particularly clearly the common link between the cult of the physical and an immature or half-grasped conception of sexuality. Only at the end of the poem is the hero freed from his murderous fantasies and confusion, when he sees his gipsy-girl (captured from a fair-ground) with a "baby-hare", in the role of mother. The poem concludes with his maturity, safe from the terrors of adolescence:

> My foolish, fearful heart grew wise ...
> And now, I knew that never there
> I'd see again the startled hare,
> Or need to dread the dreams of night.[90]

Masefield's Kane had suffered from essentially the same problems, only his wildness was finally sanctified by religious symbolism and the rejection of the impure, instead of by the vision of the family,

> O lovely lily clean,
> O lily springing green,
> O lily bursting white,
> Dear lily of delight,
> Spring in my heart agen
> That I may flower to men.[91]

The pastoral setting in such poems becomes an area free of social ties and controls. There is a typical Brooke reversal of this setting in his poem "The Fish", where the "world of lips, O world of laughter" with its "strife of limbs, the sightless clinging" is over-powering and is gladly exchanged for a watery oblivion of darkness and closeness.[92] There are many suggestions of the safety of the womb in the last fourteen lines and the whole mood is of rich,

physical harmony, reminiscent of so many of Brooke's other poems of escapism. In "Tiare Tahiti", in GP II, he wittily rejects the ideal Paradise: paradise now, in Tahiti, is more satisfactory than a Platonic paradise.[93] "Heaven", in GP II, has a similar recognition that Paradise is made in human images.[94] Brooke's wit and his refusal to be content with the expected or conventional give his poems a lighter and finer touch than his Georgian colleagues discussed above.

For D H Lawrence, there is a different way out of this tangle of pastoralism and emotionalism. While the other poets seek refuge in vigorous fantasies and exaggerated enthusiasms, as though unable to cope with the complications of moral questions in an age with rapidly changing conventions, Lawrence turns to the actual feelings within relationships. Certainly he retained his Georgian exuberance about the physical to the end of his days as a writer, and with it that slightly obsessional imbalance that appears in "Meeting Upon The Mountains":

> Christ on the Cross! - his beautiful young man's body
> Has fallen dead upon the nails, and hangs
> White and loose at last ..... [95]

Yet "Snapdragon", in GP I, and "Cruelty and Love", in GP II, 160) where Nature is used to approach human passion instead of to retreat from it, are striking exceptions in these Georgian collections. In "Cruelty and Love", the woman waiting at home sees love first in the woodbine "calling low to her lover" - a moth:

> She woos the moth with her sweet, low word,
> And when above her his broad wings hover
> Then her bright breast she will uncover
> And yield her honey-drop to her lover. [96]

But this soft mood is soon replaced by the threatening appearance of a "man from the farm below" who terrifies the swallow in her "marriage-bed" when he looks into the shed and makes the water-hen hide her "quaint, unfading blushes". Then his approach causes a

rabbit to spring into a snare. Compare this verse with Stephen's "The Snare" in GP I. Georgian "animal poems" commonly share the approach of Thomas Hardy described below in Chapter III and Stephens too relies essentially on "humanising" the animal:

> Wrinkling up his little face,
> As he cries again for aid. [97]

Lawrence's snared rabbit is, "Piteous brown ball of quivering fears!" The man kills the rabbit, "yet calm and kindly are his eyes". The language of the last part of the poem is not altogether successful but Lawrence's treatment of the sexual encounter (using the image of a strangled rabbit as Gibson used the hare) draws its strength from the real and physical - just as in "Snapdragon" he "held the choked flower-serpent in its pangs/Of mordant anguish":

> he raises up my face to him
> And caresses my mouth with his fingers, smelling grim
> Of the rabbit's fur! [98]

Her fear actually mingles with all that the man has made afraid in Nature, yet she finds "death good". For Lawrence, struggle and violence are implicit in the sexual relationship as poems like "Cherry Robbers" [99] and very many in the collection Look! We Have Come Through! make clear.[100] The emotion of "Cruelty and Love" is not yet placed as Lawrence places it in Gudrun and Gerald's encounter with the rabbit Bismark in Women in Love: on that occasion Lawrence's whole novel with its exploration of the deathliness in Gerald and Gudrun themselves, provides a perspective by which to judge the incident with the creature.[101] Nevertheless, "Snapdragon" and "Cruelty and Love" show Lawrence trying to penetrate experience and willing to accept the implications of his discoveries. Poet and reader, as well as the characters in the poems, are made aware of the loss inherent in choice. There are none of the free turns with violence or cruelty that Gibson, Bottomley, Abercrombie and Co, award themselves.

To the Georgian reader, J C Squire's sexual allegory "The Lily of Malud" (GP III) was much more congenial. This once immensely popular poem describing a mystic, tribal initiation into womanhood, has a ridiculously obvious symbolism, yet one cannot imagine that Squire recognised it himself. The old colonial fantasies of "darkest Africa" and the voluptuous jungle are also given full scope. The English reader is invited to imagine the night when all the village's "black, small-breasted maids" steal out from their huts, "stepping over sleeping men",

> And stand curved and a-quiver, like bathers by a river,
> Looking at the forest wall, groups of slender naked girls,
> Whose black bodies shine like pearls where the moonbeams fall.

Having the whole virgin population of the village to himself, the reader then finds that the girls, in a frenzy, are compelled towards something "... rising from the mud/A simple straight stem and a single pallid bud ..." Their "lips fall apart/And their glimmering great eyes with excitement dart" as the pale lily moves:

> O it moved as it grew!
> It is moving, opening, with calm and gradual will.[102]

After exercising this "will", finally "the heart of it breaks". The racial part of the fantasy is complete when "the surly thick-lipped men" of the tribe at work the next day, "chip and grunt and do not see..." One is tempted to surmise that this fantasy must have been an unpleasant joke, even down to the punning "Malud" of the title.

The theme of escape in the Georgian volumes is varied according to the location - Greek beaches, "wizard woods" in Britain, boyhood dreams of Yucatan, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, dark jungles, Arabian deserts, the mysteries of India - all serve their turn, but it is a rare thing for the poet to get beyond the excitement of finding

himself in a new place. One reason the figures in these poems seem to have for wishing to escape, is to be alone, for which there are precedents enough in the Romantic literary tradition. James Stephens' heavily Miltonic pastoral "The Lonely God", in GP I, 192) finds the perfect subject for solitude - God himself,[103] but Turner, Abercrombie, Nichols, W H Davies and Sargent are all in the same search. At one level this escapism is that described by Pinto in Chapter V of Crisis in English Poetry - an avoidance of "the essential England of 1912, the England of the great cities"[104] and a longing for the privileges of a country squire or the fantastic tropical landscapes of dreams. The Georgian obsession with dreams and the privacy of the dream world, in fact, is second only to its obsession with rural retreat and in J C Squire's "Rivers", in GP I, the two are combined. He writes of West Country rivers:

> I could cry as I think of those rivers
> That knew my morning dreams.[105]

The poem finishes with the thought that these rivers are "beyond recall ... even in memory". Harold Munro's "Unknown Country" in GP V makes the same connection, as the poet dreams of the country and its people:

> Here in this other world, they come and go
> With easy dream-like movements to and fro.[106]

Such personalised landscapes are surely a symptom of what Roy Campbell called "elephantiasis of the soul".[107]

At another level, the interest in solitude and the estranged man is a feature shared with modernists such as Kafka, Dos Passos, Beckett, Eliot and Pinter. David Craig, in Chapter 8 of The Real Foundations[108], gives such an explanation when he suggests that modern authors producing their work as a commodity and never quite meeting

their public are objectively isolated themselves. Estrangement and the isolated individual life-style are seen as features of bourgeois society and its literary mouth-piece - modernism. The popular style of the Georgians is the opposite of what Craig sees as the rich but finally sterile modern style; unlike modernism it does not match its style to its theme, but the theme still comes from the same source - the position of the liberal artist in capitalist society.

This "position" for the Georgian rural poet increasingly comes to look like a plight. Longing to join the rural community that he sees as preserving traditional values, he finds that he has no "inside experience" or realistic role to validate his utterances. Nature lyrics like Davies's or poems of fancy such as Blunden's "The Giant Puffball" do not allow him to write directly of the rural community and its values and the time has past when, like Housman, he could use the disguise of yeoman or labourer. It is not surprising, then, to find that the poet's own sense of alienation and separation becomes the normal condition of the main figure in numerous Georgian poems. The archetype of these figures is Arnold's Scholar Gipsy and it is necessary now to take a closer look at this poem and Arnold's links with the Georgians.

Leavis agrees with Arnold that "every one can see that a poet, for instance, ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry ..." [109] but he finds Arnold quite unable to make a criticism of life in his own poetry:

> In spite of his intelligence, then, Arnold succumbs to the 'poetical' tradition and becomes in poetry a Victorian Romantic. [110]

In New Bearings in English Poetry [111] Leavis argues that the "poetical tradition", examples of which he gives from Keats, Tennyson, Morris and O'Shaughnessy, requires a poetical response. It values the emotional not the intellectual, the power to "move" not the power of

wit. Though Leavis sees the Scholar Gipsy ("loitering about the countryside" in "an eternal week-end"[112]) as the opposite of Arnold himself, he claims that Arnold's poetry "comes between Wordsworth and the Georgian weekenders". This seems just to me: my examples below of Georgian solitaries remind one in almost every line of Arnold's "Oxford scholar poor ... who, tired of knocking at Preferment's door ... went to learn the Gipsy lore, and roam'd the world"[113]. Like the search for the "signal-elm" in "Thyrsis", the Scholar's search for the secret truths of the Gipsies is incidental: more importantly both Scholar Gipsy and signal-elm are symbols of values that remain unstated but that out-last the life of a mere man (like Arnold's friend Clough, to whom "Thyrsis" is dedicated):

> Despair I will not, while I yet descry
> 'Neath the soft canopy of English air
> That lonely Tree against the western sky
> Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,
> Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee![114]

Somehow the expression of these unchanging values is first associated with and then taken over by a familiar nostalgic version of the English countryside. This is the Romantic degeneration that occurs between Wordsworth and the Georgians; the culture of the feelings becomes the cultivation of stock responses. Arnold's own comment on "The Scholar Gipsy" is an honest revelation of what is often the real reason for the existence of Georgian rural poetry:

> It was meant to fix the remembrance of those delightful wanderings of ours in the Cumnor Hills ...[115]

The solitary persona is useful, even inevitable, in poems of this kind.

In Georgian poetry the main figure is often plainly on the outside, as Monro is, watching "Man Carrying Bale", in GP IV, or as in Drinkwater's poem "The Midlands", in GP III, in which the Cotswold scene is described from the observer's view-

point. Eight lines of the poem's fifty begin "I see". In this Cotswold panorama there are:

> ... rosy men, cloth-gaitered, who can tell
> The many-minded changes of the year,
> Who knows why crops and kine fare ill or well;

and,

> ... the lissom husbandman who knows
> Deep in his heart the beauty of his power,
> As lithely pitched, the full-heaped fork bids on
> The harvest home.

At night the labourers return to their cottages:

> ...happily to sleep,
> Finding the loaves and cups of cider set; [116]

One is, of course, reminded of Raymond Williams's penetrating analyses of the pastoral poems of Jonson, Carew and Herrick [117] - immeasurably superior though their poems may be. The political bones show through - watching poet and working peasantry (here actually providing the harvest) are totally dissociated and the whole poem is full of references to the godlike wisdom of the fore-fathers who planned the barns and manors (the social order), the simple content of the working-folk (who are frequently glorified in the manner of De la Mare's "Nod", as faithful dogs and Shire horses are, for their utterly dependable and affectionate labours), and the poet's own thankfulness at being English:

> And from this land of worship that I sing,
> I turn to sleep, content that from my sires
> I draw the blood of England's midmost shires. [118]

This pastoral view of England's "natural", rural Chain of Being, still one of the most potent conservative myths, has been toned down since the time of Alfred Austin (1835-1913) but the structure of feeling is modelled on his:

> Let hound and horn in wintry woods and dells
> Make jocund music though the boughs be bare,
> And whistling yokel guide his teaming share
> Hard by the homes where gentle lordship dwells.
> Therefore sit high enthroned on every hill,
> Authority! and loved in every vale; [119]

Such blatantly thoughtless conservatism will not do for the anxious Georgian John Drinkwater, writing about his cottage in Gloucestershire. In the poem "Habitation", in GP IV, he glorifies the place of holidays:

> It is a dwelling put by
> From use for a little, or long, up there in the sky.[120]

We must take seriously the suggestions of reverence mixed with fantasy in "up there in the sky", for at the end Drinkwater tells us that holiday moments are the real ones for our spirits are in them:

> But we are there - we are waiting ourselves who come.[121]

Drinkwater is earnest about this philosophical sally but looking back over the poem's entirely materialistic comforts, it seems ludicrously ponderous. There is no intellectual justification for the sweet-sounding thought about self-realisation in the last line. "Head in the clouds" is fair comment here.

"Habitation" is pure sentimentality - it is so lost in its own response that the occasion and its context are smothered. The same thing happens in Monro's "Unknown Country", in GP V, where again the anxious Georgian poet, hating the insensitivity of Austin, yearns to be accepted by "the other world" of the countryside but seems unaware that heavy tragic treatment of this Georgian theological bubble will make himself and his poem ridiculous. The emotions are inappropriate throughout. Monro says:

> I am a stranger from the distant town

and he's done all he can to gain acceptance:

> Stood in the background not to interfere
> When the cool ancients frolicked at their beer ... etc

He says "my heart is true" but he is still rejected,

> Trust me a little. Must I always stand
> Lonely, a stranger from an unknown land?[122]

Back "within the dark of London ... my forehead resting on my hand" he cannot forget them. So as we go deeper into melodrama and self-pity the memory of what the poem is actually about impishly invites us to laugh at it; the treatment of the subject is in quite the wrong key.

Another way round this alienation from rural life is tried by Martin Armstrong in "Miss Thompson goes shopping" in GP V.[123] This "lonely spinster" lives "correct and meek" in "her lone cottage on the downs" above the town "mapped beneath her". Humour brings this poem nearer to a suitable tone ("slippers" rhymes with "kippers" in one couplet), but the poem's appeal really seems to lie in Miss Thompson's independence. There are few embarrassments about the economic relations of a single woman in the country provided she lives "correct and meek" and is a good house-keeper. Miss Thompson allows the Georgian poet a brief indulgence of favourite concerns, but more than an occasional appearance of such figures in the collections would give away too much about the underlying ideology. In any case she would not allow Squires, Drinkwater or Monro to take their fantasies seriously.

The remedy is not in simple anti-pastoral like Francis Brett Young's "Lettermore" in GP IV[124] or Abercrombie's "The End of the World" in GP II[125] with its imitation yokels - loathed as "rather nasty efforts at cruelty"[126] by Lawrence. Seeing only the harshness of rural life is not necessarily any more perceptive than seeing only the beauty. Nevertheless, seeing only the beauty has a great deal to do with the feebleness of the "week-end" poems examined in the previous few pages. They are the poems of the gentleman poet, the visual land-owner, like Drinkwater in "The Midlands" in GP III[127] or Monro in "Real Property" in GP V[128] -"I've fifty acres in my head". As these writers

look over England's countryside, nostalgia, affection and possessiveness blur their understanding of the nature of their emotional attachments to rural affairs. They long for the lasting peace of secure, early retirement, but such peace depends on the exploitation of others. This is not peace as a natural right, like the peace imagined from the Front by Wilfred Owen [129] and Siegfried Sassoon.

Owen uses pastoral images in "Exposure" to describe the hallucination of peace as he and his fellows sit through the misery of a night in the trenches:

> Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knive us ... [130]

The ironic ambiguity of "iced" in this first line is taken up in the "brambles" of wire in the second verse, but it is not until the fifth and sixth verses that the pastoral imagery gives full expression to the weary longing of the soldiers:

> Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces -
> We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
> Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
> Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
> Is it that we are dying?
>
> Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
> With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
> For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
> Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed -
> We turn back to our dying. [131]

Compare the work done in this poem by Owen's phrase "forgotten dreams" with any Georgian poem using either of those words. Or, though the poem is not one of his better ones, consider the way that Sassoon uses natural imagery in "To Victory" in GP III to purge his brain of all-too vivid memories:

> Return to greet me, colours that were my joy,
> Not in the woeful crimson of men slain,
> But shining as a garden; come with the streaming
> Banners of dawn and sundown after rain. [132]

In the Georgian anthologies, as I have noted in this chapter, the "patria" or version of England very often acts as an ideological substitute for serious thought or imaginative sensitivity. Bernard Bergonzi, linking the Georgians' "little-Englander's vision" to Forster's Howards End, says that the prominent characteristic of GP I (and it does not become less prominent in the subsequent volumes) was "the stress on England, both as a poetic subject and a state of mind".[133]

The Georgian patria is, on the whole, bucolic and feudal. Nature is seen as unchanging and the English country way of life as unaltered over the centuries. In this respect, the conventions of pastoral and rural realism become tangled, which leads in turn to much gauche and bathetic poetry. In this final section I want to look at Edward Thomas's "Lob" because this very Georgian poem shows Thomas's relation to the Georgians (though he was not represented in any of the anthologies) and how the Georgian patria could act as a sort of party-line suppressing even the sensitivity of a poet as talented as Thomas.

In 1915, Thomas compiled This England: An Anthology from her Writers. He wrote in the "Preface",

> If I have reminded others, as I did myself continually, of some of the echoes called up by the name of England I am satisfied.[134]

Undoubtedly one of the pleasant side-benefits of literature is its power to call up memories and echoes but a poet cannot set out to write with the critical precepts of an anthologiser, which is how "Lob" seems to have been written. In the same "Preface" Thomas noted that he was building his book around "a few most English poems like 'When Icicles Hang by the Wall'".[135] In "Lob", tracing the essence of his character through every figure of English rural

literature and folklore, he shows that his poem was built on the same principle,

> This is tall Tom that bore
> The logs in, and with Shakespeare in the hall
> Once talked, when icicles hung by the wall.[136] (Ll 96-98)

There are odd passages of beauty in "Lob", like ll.58-68 with their strange echoes of the flower poetry in Hamlet, but the poem's catalogue method prevents any real distillation of feeling. It encourages instead that "version of history which succeeds in cancelling history", the "sub-intellectual fantasy" described by Raymond Williams:

> ..a working man becoming 'my ancient' and then the casual figure of a dream of England, in which rural labour and rural revolt, foreign wars and internal dynastic wars, history, legend and literature, are indiscriminately enfolded into a single emotional gesture, Lob or Lud, immemorial peasant or yeoman or labourer: the figure was now fixed and its name was Old England.[137]

There is as little of what Leavis called Thomas's "representative modern sensibility"[138] in "Lob" as there is in John Freeman's poem "The Herd" in GP IV. Freeman's shepherd is the same at all times and in all places. The English embodiment is ancient and constant as England:

> The Roman Road hard by, the green Ridge Way,
> Not older seemed ...

He is described as part of the landscape, as:

> ... standing stone
> Against the veinless, senseless sarsen stone.[139]

This is the sort of indifference to contemporary conditions and surroundings that precludes any possibility of imaginative response.

The Thomas who wrote "Lob" is the Georgian Thomas of the anthologies and prose guides to England; the other Thomas is the lyric poet who recognised that "in one sentence" of The Compleat Angler Walton caught a sense of "the antiquity and sweetness"[140] of

England, but it is the Georgian Thomas who wrote of Cobbett in his "Introduction" to the Everyman edition of Cobbett:

> It was an altogether English name to begin with, thoroughly native and rustic; and English it remains, pure English, old English, merry English ... William Cobbett is the only Cobbett in the Dictionary of National Biography, but through him speak a thousand Cobbetts, too horny-handed to hold a pen, hairy, weather-stained, deep-chested yeomen and peasants ... [141]

I shall argue in my next chapter that Thomas's lyrics break through the sterile, romanticised patria of the Georgians which is also the patria of "Lob". A poem that displays both aspects of Thomas (it is inappropriate to talk of "poetic development" in the context of his two brief years as a poet) is "The Manor Farm", [142] which Thomas included in This England under his pseudonym Edward Eastaway. The last seven lines of "The Manor Farm" are a self-conscious attempt to explain, in the stereotyped imagery of Merry England, the exactness and profundity of mood created in the first seventeen lines. Together with D H Lawrence, Edward Thomas shows that poetry of the natural and rural world has a future beyond the Georgian daydream.

CHAPTER THREE

HARDY, FROST, EDWARD THOMAS AND LAWRENCE

(i) Thomas Hardy

Discussed in terms of structure of feeling, Georgian poetry shows little ability to transcend or break through easily identifiable sets of class attitudes. Or, as Eagleton said of Trollope's work, "(it) bathes in a self-consistent, blandly undifferentiated ideological space".[1] Particularity of description, the ability to penetrate and symbolise mood, the self-consciousness to handle conventions without lapsing into self-indulgence - to find these elements in the nature and rural poetry of the beginning of this century, we have to turn to Hardy, Frost, Thomas and Lawrence, though none of them fully develops the sense of a complete creative interchange with his environment that is characteristic of Wordsworth. Lawrence comes closest to this profound metaphysical level, though he is always drawn towards substituting a theoretical metaphysic for the essentially exploratory and undogmatic openness of the Wordsworthian tradition.

For Thomas Hardy, Nature provided the ideal medium for the moral and philosophical enquiry that he assumed was the major business of poetry:

> In any event poetry, pure literature in general, religion - I include religion, in its essential and undogmatic sense, because poetry and religion touch each other, or rather modulate into each other; are, indeed,[2] often but different names for the same thing ...

Eliot had complained in 1917 that because the Georgian nature poet lacked a consistent philosophy of nature, he was confined to the object.[3] In 1934 he had written of Hardy that he was "uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs: unhampered by any ideas ..." And: "In consequence of his self-absorption, he makes a great deal of

landscape; for landscape is a passive creature which lends itself to an author's mood. Landscape is fitted too for the purposes of an author who is interested not at all in men's minds, but only in their emotions;" Eliot saw this emotionalism as "a symptom of decadence".[4] Eliot's criticisms of the Georgian nature poets and Hardy are interchangeable. Yet it is precisely this alleged weakness of thought, this reluctance or inability to place the poem in a context beyond the individual's understanding of the problem facing him, that Donald Davie considers to be Hardy's importance for modern British poetry.

In Thomas Hardy and British Poetry (1972), Davie argues that Larkin is Britain's outstanding living poet. Prompted by Larkin's own change of allegiance from Yeats to Hardy in 1946, Davie's book marks the most concerted attempt yet made to establish Hardy as the major figure for contemporary British poetry. He argues that Hardy's scientific humanism has weathered well and that the typical "small British concerns" - "an apparent meanness of spirit, a painful modesty of intention, extremely limited objectives", characteristics of the Movement poets of the 1950's, for example, are derived from Hardy and show a sensible practicality, "an attempt to work out problems, especially social and political problems, which Hardy's poetry has posed for the twentieth century".[5] Davie is understandably impatient that "what we hear on every side is 'Hardy the countryman'", yet the poems concerned with Nature, and at least 200 of the short poems apart from long sections of "The Dynasts" are relevant, provide a fair test of Eliot's charges and Davie's own defence.

Like the Georgians, Hardy uses rhyme, regular metre and structured forms, varied and inventive, though his technique may be. One thinks of his belief that "vers libre would come to

nothing in England" and that poets must write "on the old themes in the old styles, but try to do a little better than those who went before ... "[6] Marsh's view was identical. If the Georgians are one major element in the formation of the popular idea of a Twentieth Century nature poetry and Hardy is the other, then there is an obvious point of agreement on poetry's brief.

It is important, first of all, to forget Hardy's right to be called a true nature poet because of his Wessex upbringing, his first-hand knowledge of the facts of agricultural depression in rural Dorset or his admiration for Joseph Arch, the trade unionist who tried to organise the agricultural labourers. Such information certainly illuminates the poems, but clearly does not make Hardy safe from "week-end attitudes". Similarly there is no reason why a middle-class city-dweller should not write a nature poem that is fully aware of the socialforces at work in the country.

Wessex Poems appeared in 1898 when Hardy was fifty-eight, and his last collection, Winter Words, came out in 1928, the year of his death. Many of the greatest poems were written after 1912, when his first wife died. Though there are so many poems written over a long life-time, Hardy's sense of the finite gives a strong feeling of unity to the Collected Poems. This comes through in the form and development of the individual poems as much as in the subject matter. He works to his conclusion within his own set of rules, so that though the reader may not anticipate the actual end of a poem, its point will invariably be made within familiar country. His poems do not move sideways into fresh places or sudden analogies, though many of the ballads, particularly in Satires of Circumstance (1914), have ironical or comical conclusions. In "Ah, are you digging on my grave", the lover, relatives and enemy of the dead woman have all quickly forgotten her. At last she

thinks the digging on her grave must be her dog, for:

> What feeling do we ever find
> To equal among human kind
> A dog's fidelity!

But the dog replies:

> Mistress, I dug upon your grave
> To bury a bone, in case
> I should be hungry near this spot
> When passing on my daily trot
> I am sorry, but I quite forgot,[7]
> It was your resting-place.

Hardy is at his most predictable and most Victorian in his settings and subject matter. Something of the popular ballad or tale is often there and though the reader's imagination will not be caught out by the poem, his mind, plotting the next development, may:

> The rain smites more and more,
> The east wind snarls and sneezes;
> Through the joints of the quivering door
> The water wheezes.
>
> The tip of each ivy-shoot
> Writhes on its neighbour's face;
> There is some hid dread afoot
> That we cannot trace,
>
> Is it the spirit astray
> Of the man at the house below
> Whose coffin they[8] took in today?
> We do not know.

There is much of this in Hardy, but his greatness lies elsewhere- in the sudden deepening of the commonplace, the poem that takes in so much of life simultaneously that the usual perspective is transformed, or the unexpected verse or line which adds its own dimension to the whole poem. This is what it means to write on "the old themes" and yet "do a little better". "The Bird-Catcher's Boy" benefits like this. The poem, which alludes both to melodrama and the ghost story, is undistinguished as a narrative and runs close to sentimentality: a child, fearing his father's trade, runs away to sea and then the parents, who have never locked the house since, hear the mysterious noise of his apparent

return one Christmastide on the same night that a ship is wrecked at Durdle-Door and the body of a sailor boy is washed up on the beach. A transformation of the poem, however, is achieved in the sixth verse as the boy, having quarrelled with his father, gropes his way to the stairs on his way to bed, past the caged birds:

> Through the long passage, where
> Hang the caged choirs:
> Harp-like his fingers there
> Sweep on the wires.

The similarity of the boy's condition and the caged bird's and the naturalness of the action itself prepare the way for the full associations of the harp-like music. As the months pass and the parents still hope for his return,

> Hopping there long anon
> Still the birds hung:
> Like those in Babylon
> Captive, they sung.

Hardy has become specific ("By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept: when we remembered thee, O Sion. As for our harps, we hanged them up: upon the trees that are therein" - Psalm 137. 1-2)and emotional complex of the suffering birds, parents and son is unerringly assimilated. It is sharply focussed and yet none of the ramifications is curtailed. On the night when the parents think they hear their son entering the house, music sounds again,

> Thereat a groping touch
> Dragged on the wires
> Lightly and softly - much
> As they were lyres; [9]

Lightly and softly - no longer the harp, but the classical lyre.

Many poems, of course, are not so enriched; "The seasons of her year" or "A wet August", for instance, are on familiar patterns, using the parallel of the seasons for encountering the emotions. Well-finished as they are, they have none of the intensity of a poem like "During wind and rain". Davie has described the relationship between the metre and the flow of feeling in this poem

and he feels that here, as in all Hardy's best work, "repose transcends pain".[10] That sense of transcendence (Leavis writing of "The Voice" talks of "that purity of recognition which is Hardy's strength"[11]) also owes much to the rhyme and imagery. The poem's emotion draws near and is distanced again through a series of echoes and near repetitions. The second line of each verse ends either with "you" or "aye", light and song-like, and the first five lines of each verse seem to be filled with the family's life as the fifth line caps an almost completed quatrain:

> They sing their dearest songs -
> He, she, all of them - yea,
> Treble and tenor and bass,
> And one to play;
> With the candles mooning each face ...[12]

Then comes the sixth line ("Ah, no; the years O!" in verses one and three and "Ah, no; the years, the years" in two and four, with their alternating emotional keys of resignation and yearning). Each verse has its present joys, "dearest songs", "garden gay", "blithely breakfasting", "brightest things" and its family pastorals around the piano, in the summer garden. Even their possessions brought out of the house onto the lawn for sale are sanctified, just as all those possessions in "Friends Beyond", while measuring the freedom of the spirits, still manage to characterise them tenderly in their human life.

Worked into all this are the symbolic Imagist lines at the end of each stanza. Hardy, as he so frequently does, is turning to the natural world for correlatives, but the sick leaves, white storm-birds, rotten rose and rain-drop are especially forceful here because of their emblematic, hard-edged presentation, which works metrically and visually against the rest of the poem. They are the processes of Nature, change and decay, bravely challenged. The force of the challenge depends on Hardy's use of

such conventional techniques ("the old styles") as those I have been discussing.

In "The Bird-Catcher's Boy" and "During Wind and Rain", Hardy's response to Nature and wild creatures is essential for the success of the poems and it is an unobtrusive, integrated response. "The Darkling Thrush" is a similar case. Elsewhere, Hardy attempted a more sustained treatment of the problems of life and Nature. Maybe the universe was "a tragic accident"[13] or God was not in control. Hardy felt the need for a persona to explore such questions, but a persona not to be held accountable for "inconsistencies of thought:

> Of the subject-matter of this volume - even that which is in other than narrative form - much is dramatic or impersonative even where not explicitly so. Moreover, that portion which may be regarded as individual comprises a series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates. It will probably be found, therefore, to possess little cohesion of thought or harmony of colouring.[14]

In the poems that question the morality and involvement of Nature and God in the affairs of the earth, there is a parallel with Hughes's Crow; Hardy's titles "God's Education" and "God's Funeral", for instance, contain a similar aggressiveness towards traditional beliefs, but the experiences of Hughes's mutable and crude figure of the Crow have an imaginative coherence so that each new poem enriches, and is enriched by, the whole, whereas these poems of Hardy are limited by ponderous and conventional personifications and a dogged translation of prose thought into verse. Man's reasoned and earth-bound account of Nature is extended outwards into the metaphysical and though the process may be logical, this form of logic turns out to be a fruitless thing

for either philosophy or poetry. In "Nature's Questioning", pool, field, flock and tree are like chastened children as they wonder why they are on earth:

> Has some Vast Imbecility,
> Mighty to build and blend,
> But impotent to tend,
> Framed us in jest and left us now to hazardry?
>
> Or come we of an Automaton
> Unconscious of our pains?...
> Or are we live remains
> Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?
>
> Or is it that some high Plan betides,
> As yet not understood,
> Of Evil stormed by Good,
> We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?
>
> Thus things around. No answerer I ...[15]

Such possibilities as these are explored in many poems. Sometimes God is forgetful or indifferent: see "Nature's Indifference" or "God-Forgotten" in which God says of the earth, "It lost my interest from the first"[16], a line from a poem, incidentally, in which Hardy demonstrates his scientific knowledge about the mathematical certainty of life on "other orbs". Sometimes Nature is half-asleep: in "The Bullfinches" she "falls a-drowse" yet "works on dreaming"[17], and in "The Sleep-Worker" she "hast wrought unwittingly".[18] In "By the Earth's Corpse", God repents of his "too oft unconscious hand" and "That I made Earth, and life, and man"[19]. In "The Mother Mourns", Nature regrets unreining Man's reason and his consequent ability "to read my defects with a god-glance".[20]

In one of the more interesting of these poems, "The Aerolite", consciousness is "this stray, exotic germ" and Hardy muses, "Maybe now /Normal unawareness waits rebirth"[21]. God can be cruel too: a bird is blinded with a red-hot needle "with God's consent" ("The Blinded Bird"[22]) though when Hardy so wishes, Man changes from victim to oppressor (see "Lady Vi" and "Horses Abroad" in

which the horses are "war-waste" ... "wrenched awry/From the scheme Nature planned for them ...")[23].

Many poems use creatures, trees, flowers or the elements as voices, usually well-suited to their messages - the thorn reminds the poet of a heart he has broken, the swallow, migratory by nature, regrets its own fidelity.

Moral points are made in a different way when Hardy speaks directly for a creature. In "The Mongrel" a man cannot afford to pay his taxes and keep his dog, so he throws a stick into the strong, ebbing tide and the dog is swept out to sea. The economic pressures on the man are put to one side and the third verse focusses on raising pity by humanising the dog:

> The loving eyes of the dog inclined
> To the man he held as a god enshrined,
> With no suspicion in his mind
> That this had all been meant.
> Till the effort not to drift from shore
> Of his little legs grew slower and slower,
> And, the tide still outing with brookless power,
> Outward the dog, too, went.

The poem concludes,

> The faith that had shone in that mongrel's eye
> That his owner would save him by and by
> Turned to much like a curse as he sank to die,
> And a loathing of mankind.[24]

For Hardy, Man and Nature are dependent on each other and he condemns the master for breaking his part of the bargain. The fault of the poem is not in the idea, but in the uncritical use of emotion which weakens the whole case. There is the same blur of sentimentality in "Compassion", an ode in celebration of the RSPCA's centenary. The first verse opens with a solemn "legend" lit by the "lonesome lamp" of "a few fain pioneers"[25]; we are in the wrong emotional climate from the start. Worse failures are "Dead 'Wessex' the dog to the household" and "Last word to a dumb friend"[26].

The emotion here seems to vary only in strength, not in kind. This subjective transference of human feeling is not particularised and does not do justice to the nature of the feelings that people have for animals: the section of Christopher Smart's poem on his cat Jeoffrey in "Jubilate", is, by contrast, a fine example of the creation of a true and balanced emotion, unsentimentalised, yet not at all lacking in feeling and admiration. It is a lack of some critical quality in Hardy that he must pull all into a scheme and cannot risk allowing anything to speak for itself unjudged by the poet. His "Bags of Meat" comes near to success, beginning,

"Here's a fine bag of meat,"
Says the master-auctioneer,

and a little later,

"Now this young bull - for thirty pound?
Worth that to manure your ground!"
"Or to stand", chimed the second one,
"And have his picter done!"

But the ironies that could emerge from this resilient folk-style are not allowed to develop:

Each beast, when driven in,
Looks round at the ring of bidders there
With a much amazed reproachful stare,
As at unnatural kin,
For bringing him to a sinister scene
So strange, unhomelike, hungry, mean;
His fate the while suspended between
A butcher, to kill out of hand,
And a farmer, to keep on the land;
One can fancy a tear runs down his face
When the butcher wins, and he's driven from the place.[27]

We are back to "The Puzzled Game-Birds" of Poems of the Past and the Present, in which "treachery" was the key word and the poem's most destructive concept. The difficulty seems to be that Hardy's compassionate impulses tend to draw everything together and act as a restriction on his imagination. One may well agree with the ideas of "The Wind Blew Words" and "The Last Chrysanthemum" but detail

and variety are submerged beneath the commonplace,

> - I talk as if the thing were born
> With sense to work its mind;
> Yet it is but one mask of many worn
> By the Great Face behind.[28]

Hardy is very rarely content with pure song or observation, though when he takes the line of the Shakespearian pastoral song ("Weathers") or the lyric style of W H Davies ("A Light Snow-Fall After Frost"), he writes extremely well. "Snow in the Suburbs" is another example, its last four lines allowing the suggestiveness of the words to work for themselves:

> The steps are a blanched slope,
> Up which, with feeble hope,
> A black cat comes, wide-eyed and thin;
> And we take him in.[29]

As Nature, though, is normally linked to Hardy's ruminations, so do the poems that have a precise location relate to the emotions. Particular places in Cornwall are used to convey Hardy's feelings about his first wife after her death and in "At Wynyard's Gap" the lonely, wild vantage point with its views over "half South Wessex" seems to match the intoxicating and dangerous feeling of the adulterous meeting that takes place there.

Hardy's feeling for the relationship of the living tissue to the earth and its locality is well-known. "Drummer Hodge", "To Flowers From Italy in Winter", "Transformations", "A Thought in Two Moods" and "Proud Songsters" are all good illustrations of the cyclical idea of "earth to earth, dust to dust", softened by the knowledge of generations experiencing the same life and belonging to the same place. "On An Invitation to the United States" speaks for Hardy himself: as Death and suffering must come, he would have them in familiar places.

Hardy's nature poetry, then, mostly serves to enable him to reflect on moral and philosophical questions. These reflections, as

Eliot pointed out, do tend to emotionalism and self-absorption "unhampered by any ideas". Eliot's view is typically paradoxical, for at first sight Hardy's poems seem overwhelmed with ideas, but in the numerous poems that are so predictably closed with one thought or another, the difference between a thought and an idea becomes apparent. "Thoughts", like Hardy's personifications, are almost endless and have little potential, as ideas have, for changing the reader's perspective. The finest poems of Hardy, to me, are those which turn away from the system of thoughts for solving problems and become suggestive and comprehensive, like the end of "Snow in the Suburbs". The number of poems that really matter, then, would be far smaller than Davie, Van Doren and Larkin [30] consider to be Hardy's real achievement (i.e. more or less all). And it is not a coincidence that debate keeps returning to the question of what poems matter (the whole collection or a relatively small number). Davie's view of Hardy, for example, never comes to terms with the weak poems. It cannot, for these poems result from the overt and important part that Hardy's "scientific humanism" is allowed to play in his poetry and it is this, of course, that makes Hardy great to Davie and Larkin.

I would suggest that Hardy's achievement is both more uneven and more distinctive than this. A way of characterising these contrasts, is to look at the nature of his response to change.

Any attempt to argue that Hardy's nature poetry shows a beneficial sensitivity to change, must first admit Hardy's instinctive desire to establish the individual's power to resist change. This withdrawal into the self is contrary to the spirit of scientific humanism; indeed, Hardy's concentration on the stern inevitabilities led to charges of pessimism. These he always vigorously repudiated,

but so gradual are the processes of evolution and so hampered is Man's progress by his lack of love that Hardy's meliorism more often looks, at the least, like stoicism. His poems of country life are full of the sceptical, conservative view that each person creates his own weather. Time and again Hardy describes a perfect summer scene which is mid-winter to a separated lover or a widower, and just as characteristically country life appears to depend on what you make it and how you learn to endure. Hardy knows that in the country the first reality is the work to be done:

> That shepherd still stands in that white smock-frock,
> Unnoting all things save the counting his flock.[31]

but there are still lessons to be learned from the happy scyther, whose mental attitude transforms actual conditions:

> Though pleasure spurred, I rose with irk:
> Here is one at compulsion's whip
> Taking his life's stern stewardship
> With blithe uncare, and hard at work
> At four o'clock![32]

A selection of Hardy's poems could be made to put the case that he idealises rural life. There is the romantic "Vagrant's Song" with its unrealistic:

> O a hollow tree
> Is as good for me
> As a house of a thousand pound![33]

There is the city tree that has never "smelt the landscape's sweet serene" in "To a Tree in London"[34], the pale, lame "provincial town-boy" who longs to own a green linnet in "The Boy's Dream"[35] and the London clerk;

> Who sees no escape to the very verge of his days
> From the rut of Oxford Street into open ways;[36]

There is the poem "A Private Man on Public Men" praising the withdrawn life "Shut from the noise of the world without" and "little endowed, not wanting more",[37] and perhaps Hardy's most

obvious pastoral,"Dream of the City Shopwoman":

> We'd rove a truant cock and hen
> To some snug solitary glen,
> And never be seen to haunt again
> This teeming yard.

And, in the fifth verse,

> Our clock should be the closing flowers,
> Our sprinkle-bath the passing showers,
> Our church the alleyed willow bowers,
> The truth our theme;

The poem finishes, however, with Death as the only real pastoral:

> But all is dream!
>
> O God, that creatures framed to feel
> A yearning nature's strong appeal
> Should writhe on this eternal wheel
> In rayless grime;
>
> And vainly note, with wan regret,
> Each star of early promise set;
> Till Death relieves, and they forget
> Their one Life's time![38]

These poems, scattered thinly through Hardy's work, are matched by others that deliberately reject the "Georgian" pastoral. "The Milkmaid" begins as a perfect rural scene with its "daisied bank", "flowerey river ooze" and the milkmaid seeming "a very part" of Nature's "life, sentiment,/And essence", but the last three verses send up all the bucolic pleasantries:

> She bends a glance of pain,
> And, at a moment, lets escape a tear;
> Is it that passing train,
> Whose alien whirr offends her country's ear? -
>
> Nay! Phyllis does not dwell
> On visual and familiar things like these;
> What moves her is the spell
> Of inner themes and inner poetries:
>
> Could but by Sunday morn
> Her gay new gown come, meads might dry to dun,
> Trains shriek till ears were torn,
> If Fred would not prefer that Other One.[39]

The mood is established in that shepherdess's name - Phyllis - followed by that of her lover in the last line - Fred. The milkmaid is like the girl in "From Her in the Country", who thinks of her

lover's "crass, clanging town" and how much sweeter one little bud is "than all man's urban shows". However, she finds she is not a simple child of Nature:

> And strove to feel my nature brought it forth
> Of instinct, or no rural maid was I;
> But it was vain; for I could not see worth
> Enough around to charm a midge or fly.
>
> And mused again on city din and sin,
> Longing to madness I might move therein![40]

The anti-pastoral is witty but I would not claim sensitivity to change as one of its qualities, nor would I follow Davie in trying to establish Hardy's modernity through supposing connections between his verse forms and the forms created by technology. While one may agree that Davie is perfectly right to dismiss Douglas Brown's view of Hardy's work as an elegy for and celebration of, pre-industrial values doomed by technology[41], it seems quite arbitrary, for instance, that Davie should look at "Lines to a Movement in Mozart's E-Flat Symphony" through the analogy of Victorian architecture and engineering[42]. Why not through the analogy of Mozart's musical method? All four verses are on broadly the same pattern. Here is verse 1:

> Show me again the time
> When in the Junetide's prime
> We flew by meads and mountains northerly!
> Yea, to such freshness, fairness, fulness, fineness, freeness,
> Love lures life on.[43]

The virtuoso fourth line takes up all the halted rhythms of the verse: it is not difficult to hear Mozart's own method of composition in this. Davie's remarks on "Overlooking the River Stour" are similarly stretched. Supposedly it is the mere <u>presence</u> of mechanisation that gives modernity. Commenting on the swallows in the first verse, he says they are seen as crossbows, while the moor-hen in the second is seen as "some sort of lathe": he then argues that live creatures are "transformed into machines". (Hardy writes elsewhere of swallows as arrows and the crossbow anyway

seems a suspiciously archaic kind of machine.) In the third verse, however, the kingcups "are presented in normal organic terms" and Davie thinks the poem is faultily constructed: "The shift is notable. And yet the poet gives no indication that he has noticed it".[44] The "shift" is not notable at all, even when pointed out.

In his account of "The Wind's Prophecy", Davie actually admits some special pleading.[45] The attempt to show Hardy's awareness of modern life penetrating his verse-forms, metres and diction has few examples to work with. Yet Hardy meets the modern with equanimity and does absorb it into his frame of reference. The lights of a car going on its own way, self-contained, can express his own isolation as surely as a deserted windy cliff or stretch of moor-land:

> A car comes up, with lamps full glare,
> That flash upon a tree:
> It has nothing to do with me,
> And whangs along in a world of its own,
> Leaving a blacker air;
> And mute by the gate I stand again alone,
> And nobody pulls up there.[46]

This is sensitivity to change incorporated in poetry: the car appears unobtrusively in the poem, just as the phrase "pulls up" does not direct attention to the poet's supposed modernity. Hardy is relaxed and confident enough to make poetic use of the full variety of his experience. The voices in "Channel Firing", for instance, range from God's to Parson Thirdly's and the diction ranges from "gunnery practice" and "mad as hatters" to the medieval tones of "Christes sake".[47] Formal and colloquial, ancient and modern, the mix is peculiarly Hardy's own. He does not make a theme of modernity, but his sensitivity to the climate of his times preserves him from the sterile, "literary" attitudes so often associated with his kind of subject matter. "The Darkling Thrush"[48] is so immediate, though it

works with words like "spectre", "lyres", "crypt", "illimited", "plume", "carolings", etc, because we sense Hardy's mind combining its own experience with an acute feeling for the present and all the present's difference from that experience. The date at the end of the poem (31st December 1900), like the thrush itself, resolves and contains the poem's two contrary areas of feeling - one associated with "the Century's corpse" and the other with "some blessed Hope". That date is only the most obvious expression of the poem's unpretentious and assimilated modernity.

Perhaps it is not surprising, in view of the directness and integrity of Hardy's response to change, that his poetry is generally free of the class illusions that blight so much Georgian nature poetry. Irving Howe decides that Hardy's work is shaped by his plebeian origins and values:

> He assumes the connection between poetry and ordinary life, and writes about those areas of experience Wordsworth proposed to enter but in which he could never claim Hardy's knowledge or ease.[49]

This natural assumption of the connection between poetry and ordinary life gives Hardy's poetry its capacity to absorb change and make unselfconscious, imaginative use of it. True, his is often a literal and bathetic poetry, its structure of feeling naive and unsubtle and its version of poetry as religion or philosophy tending to the prosaic and dogged; but it is also a poetry that is seriously applied to common experience and that avoids the ideological and artistic confusion of so much other writing of the same period. And in the imagery and technique of poems like "During Wind and Rain" and "The Darkling Thrush" it achieves a remarkable intensity of mood and feeling. In this area of the deepening of the commonplace and the transforming of usual perspectives, Hardy has significant connections with Robert Frost and Edward Thomas.

(ii) Robert Frost and Edward Thomas

The anti-modernist example of Thomas Hardy's poetry, in emphasising literal meaning derived from the phraseology and tones of speech (heightened though these often are) was followed by Frost in America and Thomas in England. Thomas's reviews of Frost's North of Boston indicated the importance both poets gave to poetry's origins in common speech and in the process of making sense of, or attaching straightforward meanings to, experience:

> Mr Frost has, in fact, gone back, as Whitman and as Wordsworth went back, through the paraphernalia of poetry into poetry again. With a confidence like genius, he has trusted his conviction that a man will not easily write better than he speaks when some matter has touched him deeply, and he has turned it over until he has no doubt what it means to him.....[50]

For Frost, a "sentence sound" connects the individual words of a sentence and for Thomas the living part of language is in its stress and "the postures which the voice assumes"[51] in speech, though Thomas was careful to explain how much more work the speech of literature must do, than the speech of life:

> It (Literature) has to make words of such a spirit, and arrange them in such a manner, that they will do all that a speaker can do by innumerable gestures and their innumerable shades, by tone and pitch of voice, by speech, by pauses, by all that he is and all that he will become .[52]

To both men, while poetry's vitality comes from its roots in common speech, its richness depends on the power with which the whole context has been imagined or, in Thomas's words on Frost, the binding and beautifying of plain lines "by a calm eagerness of emotion".[53] This poetics, reminiscent of Wordsworth's Preface of 1798[54] is almost as inevitably associated with the poetry of the natural and rural world and its symbolism of the emotions. Frost and Thomas draw close when they charge the commonplace moment with significance - Frost, hearing the oven-bird in mid-summer, concludes "The Oven Bird":

> The question that he frames in all but words

Is what to make of a diminished thing.

Thomas, recalling the song of a bird in a wood, finishes "The Unknown Bird":

> Now straightaway, if I think of it, become
> Light as that bird wandering beyond my shore.

What is "religious" and Wordsworthian[55] in both poets is their feeling that Nature, and the life and talk of rural people, have innate meaning which the poet catches and fixes in his poem[56].

Frost and Thomas share all this and a language and many ideals, but comparison of their work also underlines the great extent to which poetry's character is derived from structures of feeling which are themselves determined by the particularities of economic systems. It is here that their differences emerge most strikingly.

Robert Frost, to Thomas "the only begetter right enough"[57] of his poems, was in England immediately before the First World War, a time when the Georgian poets were aiming to develop just those features that America had yet to recognise in Frost. He wrote in plain language based on the rhythms of speech yet contained in iambic forms, he expressed country wisdom and he championed country life against life in the city. Poetry was a matter of talking sense - basically a narrative art and not one where you "stand still and pirouette on one leg"[58]. Poetry should avoid obscurity and vers libre was like playing tennis without a net. Yet in spite of his frequent contact with the Georgian poets and his close friendship with Thomas ("We never disagreed/Which gate to rest on"[59]) and whatever the actual influence on Thomas himself, Frost left little lasting impression on British poetry. He was essentially an American exile waiting to be recalled to become the national poet and sage and his structure of feeling is really quite

different to that of the English Georgians.

The Georgian, searching for a lost spiritual home and anxious to be accepted in a local village community remains, in economic terms, a by-stander from the city. Unlike the commuter population arriving to set up its suburban Eden and recreating its own version of "village life", the English Georgian is a genteel country-dweller who wants to observe "authentic village life" and preserve its character. There is no American Georgian in this sense. Frost, even when he is not writing well, is still shrewd enough to avoid the treacherous structures of feeling so eagerly adopted by the English Georgians. Frost knows his real economic value in the rural community and where a Georgian would become maudlin, he becomes ironic. "New Hampshire", Frost's "Lob", begins with a lady from the South boasting that none of her family "ever worked or had a thing to sell". That Frost's rural ideal is to be a wry and practical thing is made more plain in the beautiful second paragraph:

> I met a traveller from Arkansas
> Who boasted of his state as beautiful
> For diamonds and apples. 'Diamonds
> And apples in commercial quantities?'
> I asked him, on my guard. 'Oh, yes', he answered,
> Off his.

The last section of "New Hampshire" shows Frost irritated with both the feeble-hearted "prude" romanticising Nature yet really hating it, and the dismissive "puke ... who cares not what he does in company". The poem finishes:

> Well, if I have to choose one or the other,
> I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer
> With an income in cash of say a thousand
> (From say a publisher in New York City).
> It's restful just to arrive at a decision,
> And restful just to think about New Hampshire.
> At present, I am living in Vermont.[60]

The irony here is a safety-net: sentimentality can't catch you out. Frost is similarly guarded in actual social terms. His

grandfather bought him his first farm and his income from teaching and writing meant he was never dependent on farming for profit, but in his poetry he does not strain to show he is a real farmer. He wants to be a slightly grumpy independent left alone to build walls and turn over the earth for his own satisfaction. He accepts, therefore, a rural society that is not self-contained. His poetry is wise and practical[61], flavoured with the rural but not mistaking it for a complete way of life open to him or his readers. In an interview in 1931 Frost made it clear that though he thought industrialisation and cities are bad for people, he was "not interested in the Thoreau business" of back to the land:

> We must use the modern tools at our disposal. I think we can get an analogy for our ways of living from the American Pullman car. There we are mostly alone, but there is opportunity to step out and be a little with people.[62]

This is a commuter notion but nevertheless you must cultivate your garden or farm well, for your spiritual replenishment depends on a real harvest:

> 'Fill your cellar and fill your larder' so that you can go into the siege of winter with zest. Go to the cellar stairs; look at the preparations for winter. Smell the apples. Have a good cellar. That is a part of the good life.
> A person is always being pulled out of himself socially and it is always in the person, and up to the person, to take corrective measures. He should know when to say, 'I am too much out of myself - too overt'.[63]

This may be, largely, conventional American conservative ideology ruralised and seasoned with fragments of philosophical and psychological truth, but in Frost's poetry it works in a more fundamental and telling way.

In earlier chapters I have argued that successful pastoral poetry depends on an understanding of the artificiality of the genre and that many failures in English pastoral from the eighteenth century onwards and, most obviously in the early twentieth century,

are due to poets expecting that the genre will also accommodate social realism. Frost, with his understanding of and confidence about his role, is not surprisingly the most successful user of pastoral since Wordsworth. He is able to set many highly dramatic poems, essentially dealing with emotional complexity (poems like "The Death of the Hired Man") against the constant of a simple rural background. In England, Edward Thomas instinctively took English rural poetry in a different direction from that of the pastoral of Frost.

In discussing Edward Thomas as a Georgian (see above p 119ff) I suggested that the failure of "The Manor Farm" was due to the explanation added to the poem. In the first section of the poem every detail strengthens the surely created February feeling begun in the first line, "the rock-like mud unfroze a little ..." Like all good nature poetry, the symbolism of the description is almost instinctive, though in the Frostian line "But earth would have her sleep out, in spite of the sun", Thomas comes near to actually stating the human feeling the piece so unobtrusively symbolises. In the last seven lines Thomas gives his own "interpretation" of the poem's mood and the finely sensed Englishness of the first part of the poem loses its delicate tints in the crude rosiness of Olde England. A similar thing happens at the end of "The Combe", which is "dark, ancient and dark" with its sides of "sliding chalk" and its "beech and yew and perishing juniper". The last line of the poem describes the badger, which has been dug out of the combe and given to the hounds, as:

> That most ancient Briton of English beasts.[64]

There is a destructive tendency to round poems off with simple explanations, to fall back, in the Georgian manner, on comforting popular notions of Englishness. The same thing happens in "Haymaking", for a mood is created ("After night's thunder far away had rolled/The fiery day had a kernel sweet of cold"), and then destroyed with heavy-handed explanation:

> The men leaned on their rakes, about to begin,
> But still. And all were silent. All was old,
> This morning time, with a great age untold,
> Older than Clare and Cobbett, Morland and Crome ...[65]

There is a loss of balance. We are forced to account for the delicate essence created, in terms of what is at best a very dubious historical fancy. Other possibilities are closed off and the poet's intention suddenly breaks cover. He is proving a point and the poem now looks like a Georgian nature piece after all. So many of Thomas's poems have this essentially Georgian feeling that Leavis' remark that "only a very superficial classification could associate Edward Thomas with Mr Blunden, or with the Georgians at all"[66] begins to look too generous. Indeed a recent editor of Thomas, Edna Longley, bases her case for his poetry's significance on its success with what I would see as second-rate Georgian material. She claims Thomas's poetry is "a gesture not of despairing nostalgia, but of cultural assertion" and believes that "the marshalling of English tradition in "Lob" epitomises Thomas's position as a crucial missing link" for "like Noah's ark, the poem is a cultural survival kit, crystallising the goal of Thomas's anthology <u>This England</u>".[67] Elsewhere she writes that "'Lob' is undoubtedly one of Thomas's finest achievements".[68] Yet Thomas's reputation actually depends on distinguishing the mirage "goals" of his anthology <u>This England</u>, with its accompanying poetic satellites including "Lob", from poems like "Lad's Love" or "As the Team's Head-Brass" which distil feeling, create a particularity of mood and incorporate an unforced

sensitivity to contemporary life. Poems like "May the Twenty-third", "The Gypsy", "The New Year" and "Man and Dog" are interesting because they fall between these two extremes. Though they make a deliberate, and partially successful, effort to enter into and express the full lives of particular country people, these poems remain friendly articulations <u>on behalf of</u> natives of the country-side. Maybe Thomas does understand his own relationship to the reality of their lives, but he has not incorporated this awareness into the poems and so their "modernity" of sensibility is more awkward and self-conscious than commendable. As with Hardy, the real incorporation of sensitivity to change is more subtle - more subtle even than Thomas's own scepticism about such traditional Georgian country comforts as pubs and property.[69] It can be seen at work in "As the Team's Head-Brass"[70] which, like Hardy's poem "The Darkling Thrush" depends on a precise sensitivity to the historical moment. In Thomas's poem, ploughman and writer share a sense of the war's proximity and this gives the poem a vigour that could never come from the mere <u>mention</u> of such contemporary material. Rather, this sense of the war clarifies their relation-ship and allows the poem freedom to move beyond their relationship for there is none of that frequently encountered Georgian anxiety (the poet eager to show his credentials as a countryman), which evades economic realities and so narrows the range of sensitivity. The tone of the poem is relaxed and confident. The very traditional situation of labourer and observing poet is not obscured or romanticised. The poet has moved through an impasse of feeling. He unselfconsciously asks the ploughman of the fallen elm, "when will they take it away?" The ploughman remarks that if one of his mates "had stayed here we should have moved that

tree". The casual "they" and "we" indicate Thomas's understanding and acceptance of the relationship of poet to labourer and the poem is free to explore its own areas of feeling. The lovers are important here: like the work of ploughing and the business of poetic reflection, their love is continuously present in the poem. Three different perspectives co-exist without nervous self-justification and Thomas allows the mood he has created to speak for itself. Instead of an explanation, leaning on generalised ideas about traditional English culture, in the style of "The Manor Farm", Thomas ends his poem with a simple re-statement of these three perspectives:

> The lovers came out of the wood again:
> The horses started and for the last time
> I watched the clods crumble and topple over
> After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.

For readers today, "As the Team's Head-Brass" creates a particular feeling of the moment and quality of time, but this actually works through Thomas's sensitivity to the moods of 1916. War's disruption of life is a disruption of time (the elm that fell on the night of the soldier's death is still lying there, thought circles and supposes with "ifs" and "coulds") but labour and love both counter this disruption with their own persistence. Labour, the actual work of ploughing, itself suggesting seasonal time, re-establishes normal time. Furrow after furrow is ploughed with the regularity of a clock, each marked by the striking of conversation and thought:

> One minute and an interval of ten,
> A minute more and the same interval.

Love's counter to disruption is to move out of time. The lovers enter the wood at the start of the poem and do not come out until the end!

The war setting alone cannot account for the modernity of sensibility in "As the Team's Head-Brass". It is something much more basic in the imaginative vision of the poem. When Leavis wrote of Thomas's "representative modern sensibility" it was in the context of his depiction of "modern disintegration"[71], but for Coombes:

> ... though the poetry does not take in much of the outward circumstance of the age he lived in, the mind and spirit in and behind it is modern in its delicately exploring tendency, its refusal to accept any of the old sanctions and forms simply because they are sanctions and forms, its chastening but not overwhelming apprehension of time and eternity, its sense of isolation.[72]

In "Adlestrop", though there is more than usual of the "outward circumstance of the age" Thomas lived in[73], the poem is mostly about rural beauty. But instead of an explanation of this in terms of Georgian cultural beliefs, in the style of "The Manor Farm", Thomas has created a poem that is imaginatively independent. It is an imagist poem, two stanzas for the train in the station and two for the surrounding countryside, with natural bird-song timed to mechanical pause, a pause just long enough for you to make out the fading concentric rings of sound. Through his understanding of both regions of the poem Thomas is able to use rhythms from industrialised life to express a traditional nature poet's perception. A writer's sensibility involves his most deeply bedded ways of regarding the world and it is only at depths that seem to call relevance of the notion of modernity into question that Thomas's modernity of sensibility can actually be found. One must look behind the nostalgia ("it is hard not to suppose that the unadmitted craving for an adequate social group lay behind his most characteristic moods"[74]), the agonising self-consciousness and self-doubt[75], the restlessness, the roaming along lanes and over the countryside - strong features of both his life and work - for Edward Thomas

considered just as the Romantic figure of these terms, finally belongs with a host of other latter-day Romantic poets without intellectual or imaginative commitment. In poems like "A Dream", "October" and, most typically, "Liberty", he is unsuccessfully attempting a Romantic fusion of his personal experience and his poetic voice, but I would say that his greatest qualities as a poet are related to much less obvious Romantic characteristics - a Wordsworthian ability to record feelings that are obscure or difficult to define through tracing the tracks left in the mind, and the fixing of moments of mysterious significance by taking bearings from their commonplace surroundings. The something Thomas seems to be meticulously following, the "somewhere beyond the borders of (his) mind" where "there was a world he never could quite come at"[76] is partly identified by his own turning of "the here and now, the ordinary moments"[77] through "uninfatuated faithfulness to the strained mesh of experience"[78], into those poems expressing "moments of mysterious significance". Though "March" is not in the first rank of Thomas's poems, one can see this identification at work: "While still my temples ached from the cold burning/Of hail and wind", the singing and screaming of thrushes is transposed from a physical to a mental register:

> Something they knew - I also, while they sang. And
> after. Not till night had half its stars.
> And never a cloud, was I aware of silence
> Stained with all that hour's songs, a silence,[79]
> Saying that Spring returns, perhaps tomorrow.

Silence, stained with all that hour's songs: it is a typical gathering of the experience and deepening of the mood. There is a similar distillation of feeling and resolution of thought process in "The Unknown Bird" in which three notes become the mysteriously significant focal point and in "Old Man" or "Lad's Love" in which musing exploration is brought into sensory and semantic focus in

the bitter scent of the herb:

> I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray
> And think of nothing; I see and I hear nothing;
> Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait
> For what I should, yet never can, remember:

In "Lad's Love" Thomas checks the tendency towards nostalgia and Georgian pastoral. The Childhood of Edward Thomas includes an account of the source of the poem, but the observation,"there remains in my mind a greenness, at once lowly and endless",[81] becomes in the poem, "Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end". The recession from pastoral in that shift from greenness to dark, like the adult shadow over Eden cast by Thomas himself in the child's memory ("and me/Forbidding her to pick") guarantees the poem a strange imaginative significance:

> I cannot like the scent,
> Yet I would rather give up others more sweet,
> With no meaning, than this bitter one.

What is the meaning? "I have mislaid the key", Thomas says, but the poem functions as Wordsworth's "spots of time" function. It fixes a moment of mysterious significance by taking bearings from the common-place reality surrounding it and, like Wordsworth, Thomas achieves this by breaking through the backward-directed structures of feeling of the poetry of his day. The resonance and imaginative vigour of the result is a measure of his modernity of sensibility.

(iii) D H Lawrence

D H Lawrence's contributions to the Georgian anthologies used Nature very distinctively to approach and explore feeling (see above p 108ff). In considering his poetry as a whole, one becomes aware of a great expansion in the scope of nature poetry, so that even the poems concerned apparently exclusively with animal and plant life plainly stand as part of Lawrence's total outlook on human experience. And his underlying metaphysic both fuels his creative response and remains in tension with it.

Following Hardy, Frost and Thomas, D H Lawrence rejects modernism in poetry and its most characteristic opinion - that the linear development of a primary literality actually restricts artistic meaning. He writes poetry because of what he has to say and he seeks a form and language that will allow the most direct expression of his feelings and ideas. His importance in this tradition is not lessened by his extremism (he is more "prophetic" and "iconoclastic" than "judicious" and "fair-minded"), which excludes him from a central position in Donald Davie's line of socially responsible poets from Hardy on.[82] Lawrence wrote that "the novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen" as "pure passionate experience" but that finally "even art is utterly dependent on philosophy: or if you prefer it, on a metaphysic";[83] also, "the essential function of art is moral".[84] There is a chain of intensely strong beliefs underlying these and similar statements which gives Lawrence's voice an exceptional seriousness and urgency. To Pinto he is, like Blake, a poet without a mask[85] and to Auden "it is doubtful if a writer ever existed who had less of an artistic persona than Lawrence; from his letters and the reminiscences of his friends, it would seem that he wrote for publication in exactly the same way as he spoke in private".[86] But, associated with these qualities,

there are difficulties for the poems which the novels do not share. The moral method of the Lawrentian novel, how "it can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness and (it can) lead our sympathy away in recoil from things gone dead..."[87] is well-known and many may feel that the discipline of dramatisation involved in the novel form, almost by definition ideas in novels have their coerciveness checked or removed, has artistic advantages far greater than those of poetry. Indeed most of the hostile criticism of Lawrence's poetry considers his voice too direct, too naked in its expression. This is found most strongly in Blackmur's formalist view that Lawrence, ignoring the technical resources that make poetry rich, expects "the bare indicative statement of experience" to be "equivalent to insight into it".[88] Even a sympathetic critic like Hough, taking the force of Blackmur's argument, rather apologetically calls for the admission of "expressive and biographical aims"[89] into criticism of the poems. Certainly Lawrence pays little attention to the poetic orthodoxy of the New Criticism. His poetry looks in a different direction - towards the prose-poems of the Old Testament and the poetry of Whitman. It is of the present and from the poet's demon: "in free verse we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment", "it just takes place", and "for such utterance any externally-applied law would be mere shackles and death".[90] Amy Lowell confused the issue by calling Look! We Have Come Through "a great novel, perhaps greater than Sons and Lovers"[91] but she was right to direct attention to the book's source of power and to its success. Pinto makes a worse mistake about the nature of genre in his reply:

> This, of course, is an exaggeration, but there is a grain of truth in it. The sequence contains the material for a notable novel or autobiographical work and I believe Lawrence would have been well-advised to take a hint from Dante's Vita Nuova and cast it into the form of a prose narrative with interspersed lyrics.[92]

Lawrence himself knew that his "pensées" needed the form of poetry not prose; prose thoughts he described as nagging, assertive, "slightly bullying".[93] There are, it is true, clear weaknesses in his use of poetic forms, such as frequent ineptitudes in rhyming words or the over-insistence of the Nettles poems - the "hammer, hammer, hammer of exasperation"[94] in Richard Aldington's phrase, but the poems should first be read on their own terms. I cannot see the case for law-making of this kind:

> Poems of personal emotion, like most of those in Look! We Have Come Through!, above all need the discipline of outward and predetermined form.[95]

In the same way that he insists that the novel is a means of change now, as it is read, so Lawrence wants his poetry to arise from and relate to present experience. In the "Introduction" to the American edition of New Poems (1918) he defines his own poetry as of the immediate present, quite different to the perfected moments of the poetry of "the beginning" and "the end" with their "exquisite finality".[96]

Later, in 1928, he went beyond this:

> It seems to me that no poetry, not even the best, should be judged as if it existed in the absolute, in the vacuum of the absolute. Even the best poetry, when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance to make it full and whole.[97]

There is, of course, another side to Lawrence's modernity. Paradoxically, he can be viewed as an artist wilfully avoiding the implications of change, as a reactionary in his style, his structures of feeling, his philosophy and his politics. Though wanting to speak directly in his poetry, for example, Lawrence always puts his own language and style first. In an early poem ("Return", published in 1913) the result is Lawrentian archaic diction:

> Cease then from music! Does anguish of absence bequeath
> But barbed aloofness when I would draw near?[98]

Odd as such poetry often is, Lawrence is trying to forge a language of feeling and purity. It is very far from simple reliance on earlier modes of expression. (The ultimate form of this is the attempt to redeem the language of sexuality, in Lady Chatterley's Lover, first published in 1928.) Similarly, in using myth, like the myths of Leda and Persephone, Lawrence is again taking the nearest and best, though not the obvious modern, way for his art.[99]

Much of his early poetry is, however, driven by unfruitfully Georgian impulses:

> I remember perfectly the Sunday afternoon when I perpetrated those first two pieces: "To Guelder-Roses" and "To Campions"; in springtime, of course, and, as I say, in my twentieth year. Any young lady might have written them and been pleased with them; as I was pleased with them. But it was after that, when I was twenty, that my real demon would now and then get hold of me and shake more real poems out of me, making me uneasy. I never "liked" my real poems as I liked "To Guelder-Roses".[100]

In "The Little Town At Evening", published in 1919, he longs for the repose and protection, in all senses, given by the village church "gentle and great" to "children still playing in the hay" and the houses falling asleep like drowsy creatures "under the fleece of shadow":

> Hardly a murmur comes from the sleeping brood;
> I wish the church had covered me up with the rest
> In the home-place. Why is it she should exclude
> Me so distinctly from sleeping the sleep I'd love best?[101]

Throughout his work Lawrence looks backwards to a lost state of grace, to a time "long ago, oh, long ago":

> Before the glaciers were gathered up in a bunch out of the
> unsettled seas and winds,
> Or else before they had been let down again, in Noah's flood,
> There was another world, a dusky, flowerless, tendrilled world
> And creatures webbed and marshy,
> And on the margin, men soft-footed and pristine,
> Still, and sensitive, and active,
> Audile, tactile sensitiveness as of a tendril which orientates
> and reaches out,
> Reaching out and grasping by an instinct more delicate than
> the moon's as she feels for the tides.[102]

The same idea is elaborated in the "Foreword" to Fantasia of the Unconscious and in Etruscan Places, published in 1927:

> And that is the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or the soul in any direction.[103]

The Mediterranean world of The Man Who Died, begun in 1927, becomes an Eden landscape too. Lawrence's whole account of human history takes the Fall very literally, only for him it is the rise of dualism and idealism in Plato and Christ that marks the end of Eden. He prophesies a new age, like the second Eden prophesied in "The Triumph of the Machine",[104] but in spite of (or, perhaps as demonstrated in) The Plumed Serpent and The Woman Who Rode Away, Lawrence knows there is no going back:

> I don't want to live again the tribal mysteries my blood has lived long since. I don't want to know as I have known, in the tribal exclusiveness.[105]

These pastoral metaphors, like all metaphors in Lawrence, are expected to have real applicability. There is something fundamentally literal about them all, just as it is first of all through the flesh and the physical that Lawrence believes we should live and know. When he asks the working man, then, to return to him (the intellectual) "the responsibility for the future" because it is a responsibility the working man "can't acquire, and which saps his life", the underlying Eden myth is actually expected to be realised:

> I would like him to give me back books and newspapers and theories. And I would like to give him back, in return, his old insouciance and rich, original spontaneity and fullness of life.[106]

Eden, as usual, is a code-word for conservative economics, only Lawrence refuses to associate his ideas with the bourgeoisie or aristocracy whom he sees, for the most part, as just as beastly, ignoble and corrupted as the proleteriat. Lawrence's revolution is

in the heart: you can be an "aristocrat" whatever your social class. It is not surprising that he does not write about such practical considerations as how good rulers should be recognised and selected. This deliberate impracticality, with its quasi-religious appeal to "the heart", means that Lawrence will not be able to talk to the politicians and reformers of his own day, as the short poem "The Way Out" in More Pansies indicates:

> The only way to settle the property question
> is to cease to be interested in it; to be so interested
> in something else
> that the property problem solves itself by the way.[107]

Lawrence's reality is always an autonomous, spiritual one: he rejects the basic Marxist claim that economic modes of production determine social relations. To him, social relations are mere symptoms of a people's state of spiritual health. Social conflicts can be solved, apparently, by being "interested in something else". His attitude to English industrial capitalism is consistent with this: it is industrialism itself that has ruined England and, whatever their class, men are ruined by machines and property and money. Gerald in Women in Love and Ursula's Uncle Tom and Winifred Inger in The Rainbow are enslaved by machines and industry as much as the colliers are in the mines. Whatever the "ism" Lawrence sees the possession of property as the guiding principle of modern democracy. "Man has his highest fulfilment as a possessor of property: so they all say really".[108] Bourgeois and Bolshevist, "this pair of property mongrels",[109] have the same motivation and suffer the same diminution of spirit. Men are formed by the machines themselves:

> Man invented the machine
> so now the machine has invented man.[110]

They are "the hooked fishes of the factory world"[111] and:

> New houses, new furniture, new streets, new clothes, new sheets
> everything new and machine-made sucks life out of us and
> makes us cold, makes us lifeless the more we have.[112]

For Lawrence, "it is ugliness which really betrayed the spirit of man, in the nineteenth century" and if the company had encouraged beauty and celebration in people's lives "there would never have been an industrial problem. The industrial problem arises from the base forcing of all human energy into a competition of mere acquisition".[113] Mellors puts the same point to Connie in Chapter V of Lady Chatterley's Lover[114] and the thesis could be illustrated from many other sources. Against the main direction of Twentieth Century thinking, Lawrence gives religious answers to social questions:

> What we want is some sort of communism
> not based on wages, nor profits, nor any sort of
> buying and selling
> but on a religion of life.[115]

Practically, Lawrence has no realistic social programme but artistically he mostly transcends the limitations of his habitual structures of feeling. In Women in Love, as David Craig has shown, Lawrence distorts actual events and conditions. Craig's use of historical research, his quotations from Beatrice and Sidney Webb and his demonstration that Lawrence has located his view-point in characters "estranged from any community"[116] high-light both the damaging injustices of the novel (moral and artistic damage, comparable with Shakespeare's in his account of Jack Cade in Henry VI, Part ii) and the impossibility of its being comprehensive[117] in its presentation of modern civilisation. Craig's tribute to the book, however, raises the question of how Lawrence's art does transcend his structures of feeling:

> ... it works for page after page at a depth in human experience which few other artists have even attempted. My experience of the book in discussion is that it gives off meaning more or less inexhaustibly, in a way that only two or three other books approach.[118]

As Huxley said, "Lawrence was not afraid of carrying his ideas to their logical conclusions".[119] With extraordinary integrity and

thoroughness he stood against over-developed consciousness and rationality and against the directions taken by modern democracy and Utilitarianism. His achievement was to realise views in art which are inadequate or unbalanced in his own theoretical formulations. It was in this sense of artistic analysis that Auden was able to speak of Lawrence as the greatest master who ever lived "as an analyst and portrayer of the forces of hatred and aggression which exist in all human beings"[120], but Lawrence's mastery goes far beyond this. Energies and responses that the compromises of life inevitably check and frustrate, are revived and revalued in Lawrence. His novels, stories and poems do not cause those destructive and egocentric feelings associated sometimes with his thought, but rather a greater zest for and understanding of life and our own relationships. Perhaps Leavis was referring to this when he said that Lawrence "more than anyone else in our time, makes it possible to cherish some faith in the future of humanity".[121]

Lawrence's metaphysic, like Wordworth's, is grounded in Nature. His finest nature poems derive from profoundly held convictions and the scope of "the nature poem" expands in Lawrence from the emblematic illustration or philosophical parallel and becomes capable of accommodating the poet's finest insights. Man's life, for Lawrence, has the same origins and home as the other creatures and plants of the earth:

> I am Matthew, the man,
> And I am not that other angelic matter.
>
> So I will be lifted up, Saviour,
> But put me down again in time, Master,
> Before my heart stops beating, and I become what I am not.
> Put me down again on the earth, Jesus, on the brown soil
> Where flowers sprout in the acrid humus, and fade into humus again
> Where beasts drop their unlicked young, and pasture, and drop
> their droppings among the turf.
> Where the adders dart horizontal
> Down on the damp, unceasing ground, where my feet belong
> And even my heart, Lord, forever, after all uplifting:
> The crumbling, damp, fresh land, life horizontal and ceaseless.[122]

Just as human relationships need bodily expression, so fulfilment exists primarily as a physical thing:

> It is our ratification,
> Our heaven, as a matter of fact.
> Immortality, the heaven, is only a projection of this
> strange but actual fulfilment,
> here in the flesh.[123]

Lawrence is not denying the spiritual. He is gathering it into the unity of living things - "the soul's first passion is for sheer life":

> If you will go down into yourself, under your surface
> personality
> you will find you have a great desire to drink life direct
> from the source, not out of bottles and bottled personal vessels.
>
> What the old people call immediate contact with God.
> That strange essential communication of life[124]
> not bottled in human bottles.

And:

> I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me.
> That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly,
> and my blood is part of the sea.[125]

In "Bodiless God" Lawrence makes it clear that he is not talking idealistically:

> Unless God has a body, how can he have a voice
> and emotions, and desires, and strength, glory or honour?[126]

And in "The Body of God" it is in actual things, "poppies and the flying fish, men singing songs, and women brushing their hair in the sun ..." that God exists:

> God is the great urge that has not yet found a body
> but urges towards incarnation with the great creative urge.[127]

This doctrine is followed through in the stories of the bodily resurrection and in poems like "The Ship of Death", "Bavarian Gentians" and (his finest poem?) "Shadows", all of which show Lawrence's faith and peace increasing with the approach of death. In "Shadows" there is a form of nature mysticism as still and majestic as Wordsworth's:

And if, as autumn deepens and darkens
I feel the pain of falling leaves, and stems that break in storms
and trouble and dissolution and distress
and then the softness of deep shadows folding, folding
around my soul and spirit, around my lips
so sweet, like a swoon, or more like the drowse of a low, sad song
singing darker than the nightingale, on, on to the solstice
and the silence of short days, the silence of the year, the shadow,
then I shall know that my life is moving still
with the dark earth, and drenched
with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal.[128]

If the unity of life is Lawrence's underlying belief (think of Chapter I of The Rainbow), man's disunity with creation and his resistance to nature is a most powerful artistic motif for Lawrence. The Roman separation into body and mind (dominated by will and intellect) that Lawrence saw putting out the spontaneous, naturally religious existence of the Etruscans, is paralleled in the late poem "Only Man" in which the natural world has an unusual theological significance:

Only man can fall from God
Only man.

No animal, no beast nor creeping thing
no cobra nor hyena nor scorpion nor hideous white ant
can slip entirely through the fingers of the hands of god
into the abyss of self-knowledge,
knowledge of the self-apart-from-God.[129]

Here is the biggest difference between Man and Nature and probably the most important reason for Lawrence writing nature poetry. So many of the qualities that Lawrence urges men to recognise in themselves are already present in Nature.

First, "the only reason for living is being fully alive",[130] to have "the marvellous naked assurance" of the twigs of the fig-tree"[131] and to feel at home in one's element like the fish:

Quelle joie de vivre
Dans l'eau!
Slowly to gape through the waters,[132]
Alone with the element;

"The final aim is not to know, but to be... 'Be yourself' is the last motto".[133] There is no joy or satisfaction or blossoming for modern

man until he has learnt this, until he can say, with the rest of Nature, "how splendid it is to be substance, here! .... I, I am royally here".[134] Lawrence insists on extending this mysticism of self-hood into "the real world". In "Poverty"[135] he transfers his attention from riches and poverty to the "natural abundance" pluming forth from the pine-tree. This is a personal, religious support, leaving, by implication, institutionalised inequality intact and unquestioned.

The corollary of this aloneness and separation of life from life is Lawrentian "otherness", the perception that the God of the fish "stands outside my God":

> I had made a mistake, I didn't know him,
> This grey, monotonous soul in the water,
> This intense individual in shadow,
> Fish-alive.
>
> I didn't know his God,
> I didn't know his God.[136]

In love, too, each person, having their separate being and liberty, should recognise the unknowable in others:

> She touches me as if I were herself, her own.
> She has not realised yet, that fearful thing, that
> I am the other,
> she thinks we are all of one piece.
> It is painfully untrue.[137]

Lawrence's attempt to characterise the particular feeling and nature of things results in a marvellously expressive form of poetry. From the Blakean wonder and physicality of language in "Michael Angelo" and the human vigour and variety of "Transformations", Lawrence went on to develop a unique and forceful nature poetry in Birds, Beasts and Flowers (1923). The energy of his imagination matches the mystery of the forms of life he writes about:

> Lawrence was by consequence of the type of his insight and the kind of experience that excited him, a religious poet. His poetry is an attempt to declare and rehearse symbolically his pious recognition of the substance of life.[138]

The sheer determination to catch the feeling of a creature is dramatically apparent in "St Luke":

> Thud! Thud! Thud!
> And the roar of black bull's blood in the mighty
> passages of his chest.
> Ah, the dewlap swings pendulous with excess.
> The great, roaring weight above
> Like a furnace dripping a molten drip
> The urge, the massive, burning ache
> Of the bull's breast.
> The open furnace-doors of his nostrils.[139]

As psychological analogues the poems in Birds, Beasts and Flowers are unusually successful. Most nature poetry tries to draw parallels with human life, but Lawrence audaciously identifies common forces:

> Sex, which breaks us into voice, sets us calling across the
> deeps, calling for the complement,
> Singing, and calling, and singing again, being answered,
> having found.
> Torn, to become whole again, after long seeking for
> what is lost,
> The same cry from the tortoise as from Christ, the
> Osiris-cry of abandonment,
> That which is whole, torn asunder,
> That which is in part, finding its whole again
> throughout the universe.[140]

In The Rainbow, Ursula's soul tells the professor in his gown and spectacles that he is "a lurking, blood-sniffing creature with eyes peering out of the jungle darkness, snuffing for your desires. That is what you are, though nobody would believe it, and you would be the very last to allow it".[141] Again, this is not a comparison: Lawrence uses italics in "that is what you are". And when he writes at the start of the fruit poems that "fruits are all of them female, in them lies the seed"[142], he is about to talk directly in the poems that follow about female sexuality without "using" the figs and pomegranates and peaches. Though we shall know them better at the end, they will also be more mysterious. Lawrence's poetry is a corrective to the familiarity resulting from scientific discovery, but it is much more than sentimental reaction because of its

philosophical commitment.

Lawrence calls for "belief in the blood"[143] rather than the knowledge of the intellect. In the "Foreword" to Fantasia of the Unconscious he clearly regards modern science as only one possible science: he talks of "a great science previous to ours and quite different in constitution and nature from our science"[144] and in the rest of the book he develops his quasi-medieval physiology and psychology. In "Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover" he says:

> The universe is dead for us, and how is it to come to life again? 'Knowledge' has killed the sun, making it a ball of gas, with spots; 'knowledge' has killed the moon, it is a dead little earth fretted with extinct craters as with smallpox; the machine has killed the earth for us, making it a surface, more or less bumpy, that you travel over. How, out of all this, are we to get back the grand orbs of the soul's heavens, that fill us with unspeakable joy? How are we to get back Apollo and Attis, Demeter, Persephone and the halls of Dis? How even see the star Hesperus, or Betelgeuse?
> We've got to get them back, for they are the world our soul, our greater consciousness, lives in.[145]

In Chapter XV of The Rainbow, Ursula is aware of man's most complete consciousness lighting a little circle "wherein the trains rushed and the factories ground out their machine-produce and the plants and the animals worked by the light of science and knowledge", but "suddenly it seemed like the area under an arc-lamp, wherein the moths and children played in the security of blinding light, not even knowing there was any darkness, because they stayed in the light".[146]

Lawrence was, in fact, intelligently responsive to scientific ideas as the playfully anti-Darwinian poem "Self-Protection"[147] shows, but the main concern of the poem is to praise panache and the "gay flicker of joyful life". He was excited too by Einstein's theory of relativity[148] because it made fact fluid and provisional again. Generally, Lawrence viewed science and technology as interferences in human development; certainly he saw them as much

less constructive than his own scientific myths. But he was always sensitive to scientific discovery; his rejection of it was primarily because of the carry-over of rationalistic habits of thought into the way human beings live and relate. In a period of scientific optimism, Lawrence wanted to remind humanity of its mental limitations:

> I am not the measure of creation,[149]

and, in Birkin's thoughts at the end of Women in Love:

> Whatever the mystery which has brought forth man and the universe, it is a non-human mystery, it has its own great ends, man is not the criterion.[150]

It is true that some of Lawrence's nature writing is crudely post-Nietzschean, like the feeble end of "Man and Bat":

> But I am greater than he ...
> I escaped him ...[151]

or the didactic parts of "Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine" with struggles of conquest and superior mastering inferior cycles of life; Lawrence's more characteristic position, however, is to see life as opposites in balance and individual forms of life as independent and incomparable, each in its ecological niche. "Blossoming into being" cannot be a violently competitive thing: Nature does mean creatures living off one another, but like Lawrence's mosquito, Nature does not put blood in the bank.[152] The wanton and unnecessary exertion of power in "Snake" is human and mechanical, not natural. Aggression certainly bristles in Lawrence's natural world when interests conflict, but it is more usually a place of co-existence. It is, therefore, closer to modern biology's reading of the natural world than to the old violent stereotype of "Nature red in tooth and claw".

The poem "Baby Tortoise"[153], the first in the fine series of six tortoise poems, shows all these different facets of Lawrence's art at work. One is immediately struck by the imaginative power, the

poet's ability to "become the subject" of the poem. This is partly straight accuracy of observation and description (..."your tiny beak-mouth, that looks as though it would never open"). Much more, though, Lawrence is able to use the resources of language directly because he does not patronise or sentimentalise. His encounter is full of instinctive respect: he says of the baby tortoise, "all life carried on your shoulder", and simultaneously the poem focuses more sharply on the creature and suggests a free-ranging, undogmatic symbolism.

Lawrence places himself as patient observer ("whither away, small bird?", "you are so hard to wake" etc) and he openly states his emotional reaction. In all his animal poems this is always just what he feels. Sometimes it is disgust, with words like "obscene" or "filthy" representing violent squeamishness or distaste, but more often it is an amused tenderness and delight, as it is here with the terms of endearment ("tiny bright-eye", "slow one", "small bird", "tiny shell-bird", etc) and the typical anthropomorphic touch:

> Traveller,
> With your tail tucked a little on one side
> Like a gentleman in a long-skirted coat.

Having declared his position, Lawrence ranges over our usual associations with the creature (his ancient look, his slowness, his house on his back) and works them to particularity of feeling, to a statement of the creature's otherness, through his poetic language. This happens in individual words ("lapsed" in the fifth line with its bemused feeling of being left behind a long time and its suggestion of the Latin word for a stone, "rowing" with its slightly absurd difficulty for this is rowing across the ground, "wimple" with its physical accuracy and its sense of calm and indifference to the world) and it happens through the open resourcefulness and ease of the phrases ("Stoic, Ulyssean atom" with ancient myth and

modern science in conjunction, "six times more solitary" with its sudden very colloquial tone). Over the whole poem qualities of the tortoise's life are defined and then refined. For example, Lawrence traces the sheer effort of life for the creature, through from the early lines like "heave your feet little by little from the shell" and "move on your slow, solitary hunt" to those later magnificent lines that match sense and sound as we speak them and that draw on our scientific understanding of the vast size and power of the universe:

> slowly pitching itself against the inertia

and:

> What a huge vast inanimate it is, that you must row against,
> What an incalculable inertia.

There is great technical accomplishment in this. The poem creates both a sense of the extreme difference of the subject from us and a feeling of our communion with it - we share life and the earth with it.

Lawrence's art is, then, a constant and unflattering commentary on change and human development, while his sensibility is religious in a typically Twentieth Century manner - individual, disestablished, unorthodox, reverent where tradition is irreverent, and vice versa, and firmly but ingenuously idealistic.

In the early part of the Twentieth Century, all the figures of this chapter - Hardy, Frost, Thomas and Lawrence - contribute to the enrichment and enlargement of the material and metaphysical dimensions of nature and rural poetry. The former dimension includes accuracy of observation and responsiveness to change, directness of language and imagery and avoidance of ideological misreadings of genre and social situation; the latter concerns the figurative and mystical, the creation of "moments of time" and "conjunctures of significance", and the sense of the difference and profundity of nature. Brought together, as in the best of Lawrence, these

dimensions establish a vigorous, effective and exploratory mode of twentieth century nature poetry - a mode that maintains the closest contact with material reality. Thus the demands of Lawrence's underlying metaphysic to receive theoretical, instead of imaginative, statement, are checked. In the work of these four poets, nature and rural poetry is rescued from ideological inanity, as it turns decisively away from the idealised securities of country life back towards the suggestive and mysterious areas of nature.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE REAL WORLD OF PEOPLE AND PLACES[1]

(i) The Scope of the Chapter

This chapter is centred on the materialist pole in contemporary poetry of the natural and rural world, for the fusion of materialist and metaphysical achieved by Lawrence in the early part of the century is not seriously taken up again until the poetry of Ted Hughes some 40 years later. More characteristic kinds of contemporary nature and rural poetry are those with clearly material concerns and declared historical and social perspectives. The chapter begins with Auden and Larkin's humanistic antipathy to nature and rural poetry and moves on to the neo-Georgianism, which some might defend as "realism", of writers like P J Kavanagh, Ted Walker and Chris Torrance. This is then contrasted with the modernism of Hill and Bunting, who have taken historical and topographical approaches to contemporary life and landscape. The last part of the chapter considers nature and rural poetry and political commitment: first, in the antagonism to nature poetry articulated by Douglas Dunn, then in the ambivalent aesthetics of Seamus Heaney and finally in the fully-developed materialist thought of Hugh MacDiarmid. Within the generally social and "applied" nature of this materialist poetry, there is also much that is drawn towards the metaphysical pole: some of MacDiarmid's work, in fact, operates within the field of tension between the two poles.

The range of view-point and the range of quality in the poetry discussed in this chapter are both wide but one thing is very striking: the continued importance of the natural and rural world in British poetry. The old forms of ideological cover and retreat are still present and there has been a resurgence in the religious and metaphysical tradition (see Chapters V and VI), but the

emphasis in this chapter will fall on the contemporary emergence of nature and rural poetry as a source of social and historical comment and criticism.

(ii) The humanist poetics of Auden and Larkin

In Auden and Larkin, Nature finishes up where we might expect it to in mid-century Britain: tamed and understood, it is a fit area for recreation but not in itself a subject for poetry. Though so different in their religious views, styles and intellects, both poets write of human affairs, social and personal, and leave no space for symbols and apocalyptic visions:

> To me art's subject is the human clay,
> And landscape but the background to a torso.[2]

Their work forms a forty year social and political record of concern and disenchantment. It is a humanistic record of sceptical, liberal enquiry, which, in spite of its social sensitivity, finally holds back from identification with any collective base or collective interest.

In looking at modern Britain, Auden and Larkin agree about the realities of the landscape before them. For Auden, whose favourite landscape was the Black Country[3] and who "once said that the view of Lancashire's mills from the top of the Pennines was one of the finest man-made sights in the world"[4], there is a special enjoyment of "all places heavily engraved with the tortuous manifestations of social activity - 'My heart has stamped on/The view from Birmingham to Wolverhampton' - and especially with that activity in decline, with 'dis-mantled washing-flows', 'ramshackle engines', 'disused factories, worked-out mines', 'derelict ironworks on deserted coasts', 'tramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery'".[5]

For Larkin, gloomier and less travelled, England must be faced:

Living in England has no such excuse:
These are my customs and establishments
It would be much more serious to refuse.
Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.[6]

Larkin takes a defeated delight in the "terminate and fishy-smelling/Pastoral"[7] of Hull, or "the next town, new and nondescript,/Approached with acres of dismantled cars".[8] In his heart, however, he has framed scenes of rural England[9] - the loneliness beyond the last village in "Here" with its "unfenced existence:/Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach"[10] or the Edwardian landscape of "MCMXIV" with "the place-names all hazed over/With flowering grasses, and fields/Shadowing Domesday lines/Under wheat's restless silence";[11] Alvarez accurately cited "At Grass" when discussing "the gentility principle" in English verse.[12] Larkin's nostalgia, though realistic and up to date, is nevertheless very forcibly present. In his most recent book, it is no surprise then, to find "Going, Going", which begins:

I thought it would last my time -
The sense that, beyond the town,
There would always be fields and farms,[13]

This is one of those "break-out" Larkin poems that makes elbow-room for itself with the shock of bluntness or crudities. Unlike "The Old Fools", a poem in the same collection which makes good use of its ill-gotten elbow-room, "Going, Going" keeps piling on the pressure, hysterically lumping together more and more features of modern life as "all part of the same thing":

The crowd
Is young in the M1 cafe;
Their kids are screaming for more -
More houses, more parking allowed,
More caravan sites, more pay.

The crude, amusing hyperboles of the seventh verse take place at the poet's expense and attempt a justification of his crusty, Alf Garnett lack of rationality:

before I snuff it, the whole
Boiling will be bricked in
Except for the tourist parts -
First slum of Europe:...
...And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.

Larkin's churches, as we suspected, were <u>country</u> churches all along.

Where Auden is subtle and optimistic, seeing the emergence of new beauties and interests, Larkin is wittily and self-deprecatingly defeated, though he certainly knows how to enjoy defeat - at least in poetry. It is the same in all his poems about sexual relationships. Those critics who would debar Larkin for his disposition[14], however, underestimate the importance of these moods. As emotions in people's lives, they cannot simply be dispersed through encouragement ("what's the use of worrying") or by exhortations to labour ("We must work, Uncle Vanya, work"). Indeed, the rendering and analysis of these moods in poetry is a most positive thing, though Larkin is at his weakest when he gives his "values" and "solutions" explicit recognition. At worst, as in the political solution of "Homage to a Government"[15], he is unbelievably banal and reactionary. At best, his solutions are nostalgic and romantic: examples of these dissolved and dissolving values, commonplace in <u>The North Ship</u>, are the end of "Water" ("And I should raise in the east/A glass of water/Where any-angled light/Would congregate endlessly".)[16] and the end of "High Windows" ("Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:/The sun-comprehending glass,/And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows/Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.")[17]

These final verses are quite different to those of the end of, say, "An Arundel Tomb", "Mr Bleaney", "Dockery and Son", "The Whitsun Weddings", "Faith Healing"[18] and many others. The taut and paradoxical conclusions to those poems maintain a strenuous effort to penetrate and map their material's complexities - what I have called the restatement of the tensions of the poem at a more profound

level.[19]

Donald Davie's account of Larkin rightly stresses his realism: "the congested England that we have inhabited day by day is Larkin's England ... violated and subtopianised and poisoned as it is", but Davie is, I feel, quite wrong to say that "Betjeman is the most nostalgic of poets, Larkin the least" or to speak of Larkin's "level-toned acceptance"[20] of England's present landscape. Larkin is a marvellous ironist, but there is nothing balanced about his irony. In a very English way he experiences sympathy and compassion jostling against cherished images and memories: and, in fact, as he grows older, his humane, leftist ironies are increasingly being replaced by the abstract, political ironies of the right.

"Church Going"[21], with all its vague stirrings of unidentified spiritual memories, its sense of social fracture and its strangeness of place and architectural function, typifies Larkin's clearly contemporary reading of experience and his poetry's successful dramatisation of that experience. And yet the end of "Church Going" is unsatisfactory. Larkin nags repeatedly at the word "serious" without having the resources to deal with feelings so generalised and so foreign to the world of his poetry.

As expected, rural and natural concerns, for all their hidden, mythical value, are peripheral to this poetry, which does, at one level, match social reality and exclude all other landscapes:

> On the literal level at any rate, no one denies that what Larkin says is true; that the England in his poems is the England we have inhabited. We may compare Ted Hughes, who - in America especially - is Larkin's chief rival for the unofficial laurels. We all know that England still has bullfrogs and otters and tramps asleep in ditches; yet because in the landscapes of Hughes's poems these shaggy features bulk so large, it may strike us as more an Irish landscape than an English one.[22]

Ted Hughes's other realities, whether the mythical one of Crow or the "scientific" ones of "May Day on Holderness" and "Ghost Crabs" or the rural one of "Crow Hill", may not be as immediately relevant

as Larkin's, but their contemporary imaginative centrality should be enough to counter Davie's oddly literal view.

Like Larkin, Auden also shows a justifiable neglect of nature that is a measure of the directness of his involvement with social and personal daily living. The series of poems called "Bucolics"[23] (Winds, Woods, Mountains, Lakes, Islands, Plains and Streams) is urban and urbane. In a different style from Larkin's, Auden too gives us Nature tamed and demystified. The aphorisms ("A culture is no better than its woods") and fastidious wit ("... weather/Is what nasty people are/Nasty about and the nice/Show a common joy in observing") and recreational ordinariness ("I know a retired dentist who only paints mountains") all reflect Auden's desire for the human scale and human company. He writes, "A civil man is a citizen" ("Woods" begins "Sylvan meant savage in those primal woods/Piero di Cosimo so loved to draw") and "Five minutes on even the nicest mountain/Are awfully long". The title of the sequence, like Edith Sitwell's "Bucolic Comedies" before it, sounds like an ironical last word on Georgian romanticism. A lake, in these poems, "allows an average father, walking slowly,/To circumvent it in an afternoon". The sequence provides a set of finely written, anti-Romantic comments on the traditional associations of scenery, though its deepest concern, like "In Praise of Limestone" is with psychology (mostly social psychology) and the art of writing about it wittily in delicate metaphors. In this stanza from "Lakes", the tactful lightness of the psychology is still very perceptive, especially as there is such a telling, satirical understanding of the social question of the ownership of natural resources and access to them:

> Liking one's Nature, as lake-lovers do, benign
> Goes with a wish for savage dogs and man-traps:
> One Fall, one dispossession, is enough, I'm sorry;
> Why should I give Lake Eden to the Nation
> Just because every mortal Jack and Jill has been
> The genius of some amniotic mere?

Each human being, seen mundanely as "every mortal Jack and Jill" by those who must rationalise their greed, does have a natural birth-right, which Auden characterises in terms of classical animism.

Typically, the closing words of the last poem, "Streams", secure a deep and humane perception from the whole sequence, as they wish for "the least of men their/figures of splendour, their holy places". The end of "In Praise of Limestone", a poem which begins with the solubility of limestone linked to human inconstancy and insecurity, wins a similar humanistic value from its eloquent digression on natural scenery:

> ... when I try to imagine a faultless love
> Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur
> Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape.[24]

It is not that Auden is ignorant or indifferent - his wide learning, for example, included a thorough knowledge of mineralogy - but clearly his kind of modernity precluded reversion to Wordsworthian or Lawrentian approaches to nature.

(iii) Neo-Georgianism

In Auden and Larkin, then, there is a valuable tradition of antipathy to nature poetry. This response usefully high-lights social questions and human values while checking the damaging popular ideas that nature and poetry are somehow inevitably connected and that both are, and should be, world-forsaking. There is a pained social isolation and helplessness about, for example, P J Kavanagh's poetry of nature. His debility might be lessened if he cultivated some relationship with the human material around him instead of, as in "Eclogue"[25], succumbing to falsely-posed questions of involvement (town) versus individual quality of spirit (country). The poetry of MacDiarmid and Hughes shows the continuing presence of Wordsworth's original position on this, a position summarised thus

by Raymond Williams:

> What were seen at the end of the nineteenth century as disparate interests, between which a man must choose and in the act of choice declare himself poet or sociologist were, normally, at the beginning of the century, seen as interlocking interests: a conclusion about personal feeling became a conclusion about society and an observation of natural beauty carried a necessary moral reference to the whole and unified life of man.[26]

You cannot blame the supposed limitations of the subject of Nature for your own irrelevance, as P J Kavanagh does in "Eclogue" when trying to justify his withdrawal ("I didn't choose a role, the role chose me").

Ted Walker, another writer with a considerable reputation as a nature poet, is as incapable as Kavanagh of taking nature poetry any further. He too projects his own ideological fantasies and rationalisations onto Nature: he fences Nature in ("I am thankful for the grass I own"[27]), takes it over, grabs the reader by the arm and insists with first-person descriptions on the primacy of his own significance. (For sheer lack of poetic awareness, though not in this example in a nature poem, consider the pretentious "Letter to Marcel Proust"[28], a "sincerely" insensitive account of the author's commonplace reflections on his own embourgeoisement). As with the worst of the Georgians, there is no injustice in critically reducing this poetry to what it essentially is - class-based day-dreams - or in wishing that its authors had decided, like Auden and Larkin, that nature is not an appropriate subject for modern verse.

A more interesting, though only marginally more rewarding kind of neo-Georgianism, is that of Chris Torrance. In Torrance we encounter a quite different milieu, which is generally related to the complex of social re-groupings and initiatives that took place in the West in the 1960's. The challenging, reformist events of that decade should not be lightly dismissed as bourgeois ripples. CND, Black Power, Women's Liberation, the anti-Vietnam War struggle and the

environmental and ecological movement are all evidence of a substantial and widespread investment of human spirit and feeling in progressive change. It is true that those involved in these organisations often wildly exaggerated their own direct political effectiveness and that they failed to enlist and maintain any broad working-class support, but that does not mean that the social upheavals of the sixties are part of a trivial, internal re-ordering of the bourgeois household. In Britain and America, where bourgeois hegemony is almost complete, such upheavals may be the only available ways of bringing about changes in consciousness. I am harsh about the nature poetry linked to these events only because, as ever, nature is too easily taken to be automatically expressive of "the right" values and attitudes: this can entail the casual setting aside of complex reaction and careful assessment of one's own structure of feeling and its implications. The problem would not arise were I writing about Nuttall, Dunn, Mitchell, Harrison or Pickard.

Lee Harwood, in the characteristic way that underground poets have of reciprocally building up their reputations, claims on the dust-jacket of Torrance's Green Orange Purple Red (1968) that "if 'nature poetry' is still possible today it is to be found in these poems". Certainly Torrance's work is a confident attempt to make nature poetry the spokesman for a familiar alternative lifestyle and in this respect his work raises many questions relevant to this study. Meanwhile one is waiting for the emergence of a more self-conscious, more inclusive poetry of nature, like that of Gary Snyder in America, rooted in this lifestyle.

Torrance's problems begin with the personality of the poet. Like, for example, Andrew Crozier and Lee Harwood, Torrance has heeded American demands that the personal voice shall be heard. Following Pound, he has tried to merge his life and his poetry and in Black Mountain style he has tried to make geographical/cultural maps

of his experience. None of this works very well for Torrance. In his personal display he lacks the toughness of a poet like Robert Creeley: in Creeley the personal experience cannot easily be prised out of the poetry. As in Ginsberg, Lowell, Plath, Roethke and Berryman, private material has been made public. This approach does not develop naturally in Torrance's more protected, stratified home culture, where the introverted group or individual seems isolated, rather than representative. Black Mountain, by contrast, was inevitably watched by academics and artists; while Ginsberg, proclaiming himself in his poetry, spoke in the justified belief that he was instantaneously embodying new, shared perceptions.[29] Torrance picks up these tones and, assuming a significance not attributed to him by his surroundings, tries to make an English version of them.[30] In fact, he is out on a limb. In his expectation that he will hold our attention and that his casual style will seem immediately endearing or telling, he hopes that he has made his experience universal. Really, it is shiveringly particular. Confessional poetry, the personal voice and open-field composition, intrinsic styles in American poetry, need to be re-created in Britain, not just transferred. The recent historical experience of the two countries, apart from traditional differences, really has affected the kinds of poetic authority available. In Britain, post-war culture has been shaped by the loss of Empire and demands for material improvement and, at least initially, greater social justice. Underlying these concerns, however, have been powerful conservative myths (of social unity, war-time stoicism and comradeship, British quality, fairness and superiority, pride in the national heritage, nostalgia for less complicated times, etc) and these have acted as guarantees or safety nets. You never really have to leave the familiar; and the comfort of the status quo (even the misery you know) is preferable to the risk of assuming new responsibilities or appearing dissatisfied.

It is less disturbing, or in the terms of Barthes' Mythologies less "unnatural"[31], to allow received conditions and ideas to stand unchallenged. British drama soon established a vigorous, broadly socialist reaction to this post-war world[32] and the novel in the 1950's, with its personal testimonies to shared, social experience, analogous to Hoggart's in The Uses of Literacy, also found appropriate modes of expression. In the ironies and reserve of "The Movement", however, mid-fifties British poetry stayed within the dominant ideology, leaving risk and experiment to be re-kindled at a personal, religious level by Gunn and Hughes.

American post-war experience has been altogether more polarised and more dangerous. The political hazards of a world-role, in Berlin, Cuba and Vietnam, have been matched at home by bitter divisions over civil rights. And in the self-modernising, mirage-world of a fully commercialised society, American intellectuals and dissidents have experienced the devastating possibility of the loss of meaning and identity more keenly than their counterparts in Britain. The theme of suicide in the lives and work of artists like Plath, Lowell and Berryman, and the authentic power of Beat poetry, should both be related to the dangerous unpredictability of this experience. Mystical kinds of solidarity have been present, but the zeitgeist has essentially been individualistic. Artists have had to discover representativeness through self-excavation and self-appraisal.

Artistic vigour in England, however, has generally been linked to socialism and the critique of the status quo. Intensity in the drama, the novel and poetry has largely depended on the human values associated with this critique, though there are other, more solitary and impersonal kinds of art, like those of Beckett, Pinter and Ted Hughes, for example, which cultivate a more oblique relationship to contemporary life. Broadly I would see poetic authority or

"convincingness of tone" aligning itself with one or other of these approaches.

In my remarks on Chris Torrance, I began by suggesting that the representative persona he has tried to assume, is lifted from an essentially American cultural context and that his failure to understand the difficulty of transferring this to an English milieu has led to pretentiousness and mundanity. Before taking this argument any further, certain aspects of the "underground" must be considered, since I am arguing that in its nature poetry the underground readily fosters an unrecognised neo-Georgianism. The main distinguishing mark of this is the tendency to confuse attractive, but escapist, economic aspects of nature and rural life with quasi-philosophical "poetic" ideas.

The Albert Hall Reading of 11 June 1965, attended by more than 5,000 people[33], is usually taken as an indication of modern poetry's new, public personality - young, loving, lively, relevant (even revolutionary), performing, entertaining and in tune with current social and cultural change. American beat poetry and live rock music were both important pre-cursors of the new "underground" poetry, but essentially it should be seen in the general context of the radical milieu of the 60's - the milieu of Richard Neville's Playpower (1970), Jeff Nuttall's Bomb Culture (1968) and Timothy Leary's The Politics of Ecstasy (1970). All are manifestoes from a cultural war and all adopt "friend or foe" divisions. Leary's "Neurological Politics" gives the most systematic categorisation of the differences between the "old white rulers" and the New Left coalition of the young and under-privileged and disaffected. His "Declaration of Evolution" begins:

> When in the course of organic evolution it becomes obvious that a mutational process is inevitably dissolving the physical and neurological bonds which connect the members of one generation to the past and inevitably directing them to assume among the species of earth the separate

> and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them ... [34]

For British underground poets, constituent members of Leary's new species, the prophet was the William Blake of Mitchell's play Tyger (1971) and Michael Horovitz's anthology, Children of Albion (1969) and the central conception of Man in Nature was a Blakean transformation of Isaiah Chapter XI. It was this harmonious, peaceable Kingdom (from Isaiah through Blake) that Tina Morris described in the collection, Doves for the Seventies:

> we created a new world that day
> away from all the evil and pain
> of men's petulant storms.
> We built a land of streams
> and mountains safe for man
> and animals.
> We coloured the sky the blue of peace
> and the land the warm brown of joy.
> Water nourished the land
> and life surged forth. [35]

John McGrath's "Song"[36] in Children of Albion is another example of the kind of Blakean "nature" poem that looks to the New Jerusalem arising out of the "dark satanic mills" of England. "Song" describes a time when foxes will glide up the Strand, golden orioles will "flash through Barnes and Clerkenwell", metalled roads will be green and children will hide in derelict factories overgrown by wild flowers and trees.

In this emblematic use of Nature, which these poets often understand literally, the innocence and holiness of all life, seen as self-evident, becomes a way of high-lighting the particular sanctity of human life. In the 1960's it was interesting that the ideological rapport between East and West should have been matched by a similarity of approaches to Nature in Eastern religious philosophy and in such Western groups as the hippies and the developing ecology lobby.

Michael Horovitz, who gave up his establishment research (he was writing a B Litt thesis on Blake and Joyce) to edit and perform,

New Departures, is a central figure in the sector of British poetry involved with this "cultural revolution". His two main editorial achievements, Children of Albion and New Departures 7/8 and 10/11 are distinguished by an extraordinary vivacity. They contain much of high quality mixed up with some very idiosyncratic selections, but both books have a life and impact which is much greater than the simple sum of their contents. The source of this energy is a strongly-felt humanitarianism. Its underlying drive is towards international unity and the end of oppression and tyranny:

> The apprehension of a vast dread change which would blot out war and exploitation, and free the oppressed millions for brotherhood was as real for Blake as it (intermittently) is for us - 'the Great Harvest and Vintage of the Nations'.[37]

In a development of the English moral tradition from the Romantics to Leavis, poets are now seen as the prophets and spiritual legislators of a new commonwealth of peoples:

> And the race which matters most is not white or Russian or American or Chinese or British or Jewish or Hungarian or Afro-Asian or Black - still less any of the careering rat-races - but that of all mankind, chosen by birth in this age to shoulder the burdens of world citizenship.[38]

Such a style, whether in editorials, poems or the structure and texture of anthologies, is inevitably vulnerable to worldly, discerning criticism, as are its philosophical counter-parts in "alternative" culture. This vulnerability is a function of the untheorised and sentimentalised generosity of the underground's creed, as Horovitz expounds it. If your attitudes are those of Albion, you are a deserving friend. Horovitz's Albion is big enough to include many successful establishment figures and, as in Eric Mottram's useful polemical review of the British poetry scene, "The British Poetry Revival 1960-1974"[39], those who are "for us" are pictured as a united and uncorrupted front. Within the membership,

the divisiveness of literary judgements on individuals takes second place to the importance of mounting a general cultural offensive, but Art often develops through such coteries and cliques, necessarily setting up exclusive and, in retrospect, frequently absurd criteria.

New Departures 7/8 and 10/11 is dedicated to twenty-eight artists and writers who died between 1966 and 1974 "and all the others 'with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies'; toward the regeneration of their works and lives, this gathering is consecrated".[40] Though he cannot avoid recrimination and in-fighting altogether, Horovitz strives to unite poets. In his essays he likes to be liberal with personal praise, to name artists in the ritualistic style of the Beats and to exhort writers and others to recognise their shared, creative morality:

> The international community of surviving dissident intellectuals, pacifists, revolutionaries, and those committed to the practice of poetry and the arts is made up of small units which don't always interlock. But ... poets do well, who absent their energies from internecine fussing and feuding and shoulder the responsibility for helping to bring ... back to life ... the broad libertarian front ... I believe there are more and more poets and artists today, in deeper knowledge of the potential scope of our pens and profound [sic] :- and yet We are Few if pitted against the forces of darkness...[41]

This commitment is not always borne out in practice. The essence of committed writing is the forceful dramatisation of a particular point of view: committed writing does not pretend to answer or make allowances for the opposition's case. The weakest underground poetry, however, counts on being on the right side. It relies on the support of its context and substitutes the diluted tones of imperfect dramatisation[42] for the difficult authenticity of real protest. The ideology of Albion, therefore, may be used counter-productively. No poet, surely, wishes to be received as an act of fraternal good-will, yet this is as much a danger to poets of the

underground as it is to the poets of the establishment.

To his friends, fellow-writer Barry MacSweeney and publisher-writer Iain Sinclair, Chris Torrance is an explorer and an intensely serious and rewarding artist. MacSweeney comments,

> His communication with nature is a mutual one, "the hiding places of infinite power". A gathering which makes my real world spiritual and my spiritual world real ... we are increased by the stirring of the spirit, made generous in return ... a gentle openness abides which yields a real joy -[43]

And for Sinclair:

> Reading into Magic Door I am driven again on the fact that Chris Torrance is doing my work for me: Relation Ship ("who does the work becomes his own father") or shabti-figure, mattock on shoulder, in a parallel universe. He is active in that damp green valley that is my own dream; curse and cure. His work completes the imagined landscape of my eternally-repeating childhood... ...Torrance is now working for so many. They would take the same steps, but they do not, they read of it.[44]

Torrance's solitary effort is, then, something like an attempt to live out and write through the cultural values of Albion. When he discovered that he preferred David Jones's Anathemata to Pound's Cantos, Torrance was summing up the sense of fusion between "revolutionary humanism" and "the stirring of folk memory" experienced by a whole generation, from the admirers of Tolkien to the midsummer visitors to Glastonbury Tor:

> But here in Jones I find a continual warmth, a sacred, illuminative warmth, compounding history nearer to home.[45]

In his life and work, Torrance is a pilgrim who attempts to confront his own enervation and nightmare and self-loathing and dependency, with the symbols and beliefs of the underground's culture. This active, personal testing ("the trap is you, learning how to live with yourself"[46]) has clearly given Torrance a respected position in the underground. No doubt it is valid to see the life and the work as one, a fusion Torrance himself insists on in his poetry, and no doubt he will seem an interestingly typical figure to future

literary research, but the reader must begin with the offering of poetry and unlike Ginsberg, for example, Torrance cannot take the structure of feeling of his sub-culture into a wider arena. He writes with a dependence on ideology and a lack of self-consciousness which are matched by an apparent ignorance of the pitfalls of nature and rural writing. Only in his ability to use "found" language does Torrance achieve any distinctiveness. In the piece below, for example, he has some success in his use of precise geological description:

> Subsidence was pulsatory
> the Neath Valley Disturbance
> soup-plate crack settling
> grinding edge
> of the Hercyian orogeny
> metamorphosis of deposits
> formation of the fine anthracites
> of the Vale of Neath [47]

Another example of the appropriation of scientific language is the end of "Banks of Tropic Air",[48] with its felicitous handling of the terms of meteorology and its satellite-perspective on the European weather-scope:

> But should the wind veer Northwards behind a low,
> we meet the line of frost, creeping ever Southwards
> in the declining light, filling at first the
> uplands valleys with cooling pockets of air, then
> gripping the Midland plain, and the Southlands,
> blackening soft half-hardy vegetables and fruits,
> stripping flowers, stripping leaves.

Another poem, "The Peacock's Tail," ends with a similiarily effective passage:

> Nibbling at France, the inside lip of the cyclone
> rides up tyranically, thunder and hailforce Westerly
> an oak in the distributory at Pont Melin Fach
> rain batters on the kitchen roof, the ears of the fungi
> listen out from the beam. [49]

Torrance's publications form a very personal record, from the gardening day-dreams of Carshalton in Green Orange Purple Red (1968) to the Wales of Citrinas (1977). It is the ideological location of this enterprise that I would like to go on to consider, for in

presenting the intersections of his own geographical and historical determinants, Torrance often seems, unhappily, unaware of the political and poetic repercussions.

Acrospirical Meanderings in a Tongue of the Time (1973), sub-titled in diary style "Glynmercher Isaf, June 1970 to October 1972", is a collection of poems, all dated and many dedicated to friends; Torrance's readership, one feels, is an intimate circle and in Acrospirical Meanderings there are photos of the poet in various rural settings. At the start of the book there is a geological map of the Glynmercher Isaf area, while the covers display old wood-cuts of an astronomer looking through a telescope and a farm-yard with a woman apparently sieving grain and a man carrying sacks.

The whole enterprise is put more explicitly in "Midsummer Sun Declining":

> writing by candlelight
> the most ancient strobe of man
> his firelight
> tables of his ancestors
>
> perpetuation myth identity
>
> the faces of many friends pass before me in dreamy procession
> I am so many people I am not I am everybody else
> but in singular order, not in plurality.
> I see myself as vestiges, backdrops, moods, images, casts [49]

But the Romantic desire to incorporate himself in the discoverable truth of poetry can lead to that dejection which only a major talent can turn to good. In Torrance it is recorded all too honestly:

> - this is depressed talk, and I struggle
> with the need for honesty vs. the
> boredom and self-pity
>
> have to watch
> the ego, the nauseating
> polyglot, polyamous ego [50]
> "desirous of fame".

We might begin to wonder why this should be communicated at all.

In "Letter to Barry MacSweeney", from Citrinas, Torrance, remembering the revelatory charm of the letters and diaries of the Lake Poets, self-consciously and prematurely enshrines his own daily life, but the process of "compounding history nearer to home" is more difficult than this. The poem begins with some geological description of landscape and mention of a cavern where King Arthur and his men lie "awaiting the clarion call that will signify to the sleeping warriors that the Britons need rescuing again": it goes on to describe the feel of the early summer evening. For the actual synthesis or "compounding" Torrance substitutes a complacent self-regard, a Georgian self-importance about "the poet and his circle". That jokey reference to King Arthur typifies the comfortable insularity of Torrance's structure of feeling: like his own appearances in his poetry, King Arthur, King Brychan, the solitary stone Maen Madoc, etc, all appear as sources of unexplored value. The connections that, say, Geoffrey Hill would make between them and current experience, remain unexamined. Instead, they are possessively and mystifyingly respected as the magical property of the Albion community.

Similarly unexamined, is the line "I am sunk in thoughts of my love"[51], thrice repeated in the course of a sonnet, and this blithe fancy about nature poetry:

> sitting in cherry blossom showers
> under a warm sky, who can sit
> in all this and
> not write poems [52]

In "Letter to Lee" he asks "what can I write to Lee?" and "what should I write to Lee?"; in "Chopping Water" he speaks of the sullen summertide and his "epidemic flashes of virus-gut infection,/ lowering of spirits, the creative credibility gap/widening". [54] These characteristically and disarmingly ingenuous features of Torrance's poetry act, in my view, as debilitating escape-clauses

which damagingly allow him to assume an unearned sense of social representativeness and imaginative importance.

Torrance, as Sinclair and MacSweeney indicate, has taken the urban underground culture of the 60's and attempted to root it in rural Wales. The workings of the relocation are treated in "The Transforming Substance", [55] which begins by setting the 60's culture-hero Jimi Hendrix against the establishment's champion "Jimi's elderly white-haired English landlady". Torrance's next book, Citrinas, appeared to have less esoteric concerns. It is dedicated, not to a friend, but "to the inhabitants of the Vale of Neath and its tributaries", yet the tone of this book is set by the opening photograph of a pre-historic standing stone and the first poem's last verse defines the poet's rôle in the limbo-language of romanticised legend and literary escapism:

> The Court jester
> by his artistry
> influences affairs
> of State
> in the drenched lands
> where an unbroken
> dynasty of Kings
> stretches back
> to a lone
> standing stone
> on a bald-headed
> conical mountain [56]

The people that Torrance is interested in, as "Coda" later makes clear, are the archetypal, pre-Saxon inhabitants of the area and, as in The Magic Door, he wants to search for those connections severed by modern life:

> and the moorland changes
> the moorland animals
> flee one by one
> from disinfectant
> coniferous tides
>
> but who are we?
> and are we still One
> with the Mother? [57]

We are persistently reminded of the "underground" origins of these rural endeavours in cultural archaeology. Torrance can write well on geology and meteorology, but the integrated achievement he is seeking, in my view, will continue to elude him until he radically questions the social cocoon of the underground and the nature of the poetic voice he has inherited or assumed from that milieu.

In terms of its structure of feeling, then, there is much in Torrance's poetry that is unaware. This unawareness is a measure of the distance one senses between the experience of "the inhabitants of the Vale of Neath" and that of the migrants from the counter-culture of Albion; Torrance writes, in effect, as a neo-Georgian and this becomes plain in his lack of understanding of his own economic position within his adopted community. Robert Frost's poetry demonstrates that for rural poetry to avoid ideological fantasy, poets must have no illusions about the nature and value of any "work" they may do within that community. In fact, the general awareness and understanding of their economic role that poets have, is a vital factor in their structures of feeling. The classic right-wing view of "the poet in the economy" is that of T S Eliot, who himself began writing while working in a London bank: if you do not become eminent and rich through your own literary success, you must quietly work in an office or factory like anyone else, unless, of course, you adopt a Bohemian style. That would be your own affair and you would have to finance it accordingly. Eliot's view is consistent with his aesthetic theories about the poet's neutralisation of his or her own personality, and it also shows a decent regard for the place of the arts in bourgeois society. The poet may be a perceptive satirist or social critic, but not a trouble-maker.

For artists of the 60's, broadly aligned on the Left, the model became the poet as worker. Eric Mottram quotes Norbert Wiener on the artist and scientist as both working "to discover the order and organisation of the universe".[58] There is no compromise: art is accorded occupational parity with science. Earlier in the same essay Mottram stresses that poetry is a job and poets are workers:

> But poets have jobs which restrict where they live.
> Like other workers, they try to reduce the amount of
> daily travel for information, goods, relationships.[59]

The poet considered as "worker", however, is in an invidious position: the few poets who do live entirely from readings, publications and grants cannot press the comparison with productive industry too militantly.[60] It is more important that they should understand their economic location realistically, especially if their poetry seems concerned to project a consistent political view.

In dedicating his poetry to the inhabitants of the Vale of Neath and its tributaries, Torrance is seeking to belong to the community and to be given worker-poet status. In his first book, the poem "The Grasscutters on the Green"[61] deliberately pictures the work of gardening as a student pastoral. "Nothing happened" but the newly-mown grass was collected for horse-food, "Brian's girl was sensational/visiting us in bright slacks", they fiddled with Brian's motor-bike and talked about rhythm and blues and finished early. It is a similar day in "Gouache"

> all day at work did nothing but
> read Jung and play Mike at chess
> the yellow day moving silently.[62]

Torrance's reality appears a few pages later in a Henri/McGough remark (though MacDiarmid's "Glasgow 1960" would be a better reference point): "no poetry in the news"[63]. This easy-going alternative culture is cheerfully poor:

> warming the last
> of the fourday soup on the stove
> your smooth figure drifting encircling my thoughts[64]

Uninhibited sexuality and "taking it easy", both revalued by the underground, are offered as agreeable sensations to the fraternal reader. Freedom from criticism and over-bearing authority, as in pop poetry, is deliberately expressed in the uncensored, "this is me" style:

> I will continue to
> dismember sunsets and young girls fresh
> from school and listen disinterestedly
> to the Beatles whom you insist
> you like. [65]

Torrance is aligning himself with the Liverpool poets here. Unlike the Beats or Rimbaud systematically deranging their senses or flower people risking pacificism and "universal love", they provide no social critique. Their most serious value is a highly romanticised view of themselves as "poets", which turns out to mean that they are pop stars manqué.

When Torrance gets to Wales, the flip subversion of work gives way to earnestness about how much work he is doing. "Letter to Lee" attempts to impress us with the meaningfulness of the poet's working relationship with his surroundings, but unlike the farmer Rhys who can toss lamb carcasses twenty feet up into a thorn tree away from the dogs,

> I bungled the pitch, the lamb only
> crashing half-way into the thorn before
> falling back to within a few feet
> of the ground. Defeated and depressed,
> I left it where it hung, to the
> tender mercies of the crows and chasing
> ravens. [66]

The poem records a crisis of individual validity within the neighbourhood, though its spirits do pick up at the end by returning to Torrance's meteorological expertise.

The next poem in The Magic Door, "O Spirit of my Mother", brings the question of economic relations into the open but then subsides into a truly Georgian (except for the dope) bucolic dream:

> Sunday. Discontent. Lost last little bit of dope.
> Then Rhys came in again. "You're a gentleman of
> leisure Torrance" he said. "I'm not a gentleman of
> leisure Rhys I'm a poet", I replied somewhat
> snappishly.... ....At the other extreme lies, I
> know, a joyous, carefree happiness, associated with
> loving Val, being involved with friends, poetry,
> dope; living this dream.

A few pages further on, poet and farmer are working together, their separate aims declared:

> The farmer steadily works
> "fresh hay it is"
> a fingernail bent back
> in a bale "for a pound a day
> its ridiculous" says Chris
> a sharpened dock spikes-in
> regardless under the cuticle
> "but it's service to Mother Nature" [67]

Service to Mother Nature is not a farmer's reason for hay-making, but Torrance still has a basic need to identify with his adopted community [68] and to make his poetry adequate to the geological, historical and cultural variety around him. In "Rock Crazy" [69] the effort to belong is strenuously made but the failure to belong is the poem's actual message.

Its closing lines, with the mention of real working materials and substances and a cheerful little resolution about a bicycle, take us above the unopposed new road back up to the Georgian [70] cottage. It is a telling separation:

> ...have had this road march across their backyard
> without the evidential logic to resist
> acquired purchase
> on this and these I reflect
> as I leap back up the hill
> with paraffin & hammer . & nails
> to help build our new fence
> the brakes are failing in the dips
> I must see to them again.

The questions remain: how do you belong, on whose behalf is your artist's life lived, how do you compound history nearer to home? Torrance's poetry does not have a certain tenacity, but it falls far short of achieving its most ambitious central attempt - the synthesis in poetry of the lines of cultural, social and personal experience that converge in a writer's mind.

(iv) The Modernism of Basil Bunting and Geoffrey Hill

In the modernism of Basil Bunting and Geoffrey Hill, there are other ways of attempting this synthesis, without the personalisation and self-mythologising of Torrance. Briggflatts (1966) and Mercian Hymns (1971) seem to me to be strikingly successful achievements. The musical form of the first allows thematic development, while the persona of the second permits the formation of many layers of meaning and suggestion. Both maintain a high level of verbal intensity: concentration of image and rhythmical craftmanship make these poems with no dead spots. Bunting and Hill have the basic poetic requirement of hearing the sound-values of language and the rhythms of speech. [71] The opening lines of Briggflatts and

Mercian Hymns given below, quite apart from the emblematic suggestiveness of Bunting's dancing bull and background of white may and the wit and scope of Hill's cultural and historical links, should be read aloud for their sound qualities. These are musical/ rhetorical forms of address that carefully set up expectations about the nature of the poetry to follow:

> Brag, sweet tenor bull
> Descant on Rawthey's madrigal
> each pebble its part
> for the fells' late spring.
> Dance tiptoe, bull,
> black against may.
> Ridiculous and lovely
> chase hurdling shadows
> morning into noon.
> May on the bull's hide
> and through the dale
> furrows fill with may,
> paving the slowworm's way.[72]

> King of the perennial holly-groves, the
> riven sand-stone: overlord of the M5:
> architect of the historic rampart and
> ditch, the citadel at Tamworth, the
> summer heritage in Holy Cross: guardian
> of the Welsh Bridge and the Iron Bridge:
> contractor to the desirable new estates:
> saltmaster: money-changer: commissioner
> for oaths: martyrologist: the friend of
> Charlemagne.
>
> 'I liked that', said Offa, 'sing it again'.[73]

As modernist poetry, neither Briggflatts nor Mercian Hymns is primarily about nature. Nature and rural location are, rather, important, integrated parts of both, though one can still try to identify their significance in these poems and attempt to measure the extent to which Hill and Bunting avoid the ideological snares associated with their use.

Basil Bunting, born in 1900, began to attract a real following in Britain in the 1960's. At a time when regional poetry was defining itself in opposition to literary activity in London, Bunting, a native of Northumbria and friend of Pound and Zukovsky, became the elder statesman of a poetic "revival" in the north-east involving young writers like Tom Pickard and Barry MacSweeney.

This enthusiasm, however, has not been widely shared. Bunting has not been hailed as a significant English modern and he has not received any degree of critical interest. Anthony Thwaite's puzzling non-assessment is typical ("Bunting's real standing seems to be that of someone who has survived with lonely integrity"[74]), while for a full-blooded, and typical, attack on Bunting one must turn to W E Parkinson:

> Bunting's work ... must be mentioned because of its harmful influence on the work of the younger poets. His work and theirs reveals a lack of modern sensibility ... Briggflatts, a clumsy poem in the heroic mood, contained a hodge-podge of poetic styles ... a meretricious display of erudition ... an elitist view of life and art ... the facile rejection of modern society; contempt for modern man, present in Briggflatts ... over-weening pessimism, proud cynicism and the dishonest use of history conjuring up a former Northumbrian Golden Age that cannot be recovered ... apparently considers himself an embattled intellectual engulfed and threatened by hostile events while struggling to be the bearer of real cultural values ... often turgid rhetoric ... other elitist symptoms ...[75]

As in Hugh MacDiarmid (quite apart from Yeats, Eliot and Pound), Bunting's elevation of cultural values is a mark of his anti-imperialism. He expects us to honour other cultures, whether Latin or Persian and he has always refused to elevate English concerns into a standard against which to measure the significance of the concerns of others. MacDiarmid and Bunting challenge those who think socialism is about levelling down or "cashing-in our cultural heritage" and they reject the idea that only the Right should be associated with quality. In their account of our society, individuality is stunted not by socialism but by the status quo of the capitalist money ethic. One of Bunting's poems on the effects of the agricultural depression around 1930, given complete below, is a better indication of his basic moral disposition than all Parkinson's accusations of elitism:

The ploughland has gone to bent
and the pasture to heather;
gin the goodwife stint,
she'll keep the house together.

Gin the goodwife stint
and the bairns hunger
the Duke can get his rent
one year longer.

The Duke can get his rent
and we can get our ticket
twa pund emigrant,
on a CPR packet.[76]

The charge that Bunting is derivative or has no mode of his own is especially misplaced. Certainly Briggflatts has Eliotic echoes, at the start of the second section for example, but Bunting's distinctive method in this poem (in which there is, incidentally, little trace of Pound) can be appreciated by contrasting it with Eliot's in Four Quartets (1944). Both are poems about time, utilising the musical imagery of the quartet and the sonata, but where Eliot is impersonal, philosophical and religious, Bunting is autobiographical, sensuous[77] and very much grounded in mortality. Even when considering the material cycle of earth, Eliot characteristically tends to the euphemistic and abstract ('dung and death') while Bunting is the opposite ('Wheat stands in excrement'). 'Dung' excepts human involvement, while 'excrement' insists on it. Both poems explore the present's containment of the past[78], but where Eliot's poem is a masterpiece of meditative philosophy, Bunting's is a direct evocation of the feeling of the past within the present. At the point where Eliot's language becomes deliberately archaic ("The association of man and woman/In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie"[79]-), Bunting brings Viking Northumbria into his own experience of early love (Part I, verses 5 and 6). Eliot's impersonal and comprehensive use of his own present experience (from the socially rarified feelings at the start of "Burnt Norton" to the imagery of the London underground and the Blitz) is certainly paralleled in Bunting (from the "poet" section at the start of Part II

to the sudden modern chill of "Stone smooth as skin,/cold as the dead they load/on a low lorry by night"[80]), yet their attitudes to the poet's presence in the poem are very different. Compare the ironical distance of "Prufrock" with the beautifully lyrical end of Briggflatts:

> Finger tips touched and were still
> fifty years ago.
> Sirius is too young to remember.
>
> Sirius glows in the wind. Sparks on ripples
> mark his line, lures for spent fish.
>
> Fifty years a letter unanswered;
> a visit postponed for fifty years.
>
> She has been with me fifty years.
> Starlight quivers. I had day enough.[81]
> For love uninterrupted night.

Parkinson's other main criticisms, about Bunting's lack of a modern sensibility, rejection of modern man, pessimism, cynicism, heroic manner and glorification of a former Northumbrian Golden Age, are generally connected, in the terms of this thesis, to questions of structures of feeling, sensitivity to change and its incorporation in poetry. Bunting's work, then, should perfectly exemplify break-down and failure in these areas. Yet if it is right to argue that such failure in poetry is basically a matter of the substitution of ideological fantasy for imaginative sensitivity, we can find no case against Briggflatts. To illustrate this, we may turn to the two areas of the poem superficially most open to such charges: the Bloodaxe passages and the parts about the poet's role in modern life.

The first point about the pre-Norman world of Briggflatts is its textural relationship to present Northumbria. As Peter Brook, when directing King Lear in 1962, sought to discover the practicalities of our elemental dependence on clothes and shelter and fire[82], so does Bunting approach the conditions of physical life through the

historical landscape. The cultural identity of Northumbria (and the poet as lover) in the stanzas below is certainly achieved by mention of the violent militarism of the past, but not by romanticising it. The sexuality of the lover, in Lawrentian style, is discussed in historical metaphors (copper-wire moustache, sea-reflecting eyes, Baltic plainsong speech, etc) but I find no call to a Viking revival or hint of "Golden Age" nostalgia in the evocation of a "placed" recollection of love:

> Stocking to stocking, jersey to jersey,
> head to a hard arm,
> they kiss under the rain,
> bruised by their marble bed.
> In Garsdale, dawn;
> at Hawes, tea from the can.
> Rain stops, sacks
> steam in the sun, they sit up.
> Copper-wire moustache,
> sea-reflecting eyes
> and Baltic plainsong speech
> declare: By such rocks
> men killed Bloodaxe.
>
> Fierce blood throbs in his tongue,
> lean words.
> Skulls cropped for steel caps
> huddle round Stainmore.
> Their becks ring on limestone,
> whisper to peat.
> The clogged cart pushes the horse downhill.
> In such soft air
> they trudge and sing,
> laying the tune frankly on the air.
> All sounds fall still,
> fellside bleat,
> hide-and-seek peewit.[83]

Bunting's interest in the moments of love and their swift departure ("Love is a vapour, we're soon through it"[84]) and the effort to recreate and hold them in poetry (for the mason in Briggflatts, "pens are too light. / Take a chisel to write"[85]) are based on his apprehension of an "inescapable fact":

> Obviously the one which has got to be taken into account almost first of all, but certainly all the time, is the fact that we don't live very long. The minute you begin to consider it, the fact that you're going to die is almost the only thing that makes life worth living at all.[86]

When, in Part II, he describes the death of Bloodaxe at Stainmore[87], Bunting is not covertly longing for a past heroic age. He is, rather, using a strongly-coloured historical moment to fix his theme of tempus edax rerum: the whole section is directly preceeded by the "reproached/uneasy mason//shaping evasive/ornament/litters his yard/with flawed fragments"[88]and is directly followed by a set of "musical" readings of nature ("Starfish, poinsettia on a half-tide crag,/a galliard by Byrd"[89], etc), both of which direct us to the reading of Bloodaxe I have been suggesting.

In presenting questions of the poet's role, Bunting, again, could be characterised as a world-forsaker, abandoning modern life to return to the comforts of the past. This would be to take the start of Section IV, concerning the Welsh bards Aneurin and Taliesin, at face value:

> I hear Aneurin number the dead and rejoice,
> Being adult male of a merciless species.
> * * * * * *
> Aneurin and Taliesin, cruel owls
> for whom it is never altogether dark, crying
> before the rules made poetry a pedant's game.[90]

This mood of savagery ("runts murder the sacred calves of the sea by rule"[91]) is the opposite of the other poetic mood of Briggflatts, that of self-disgust and degradation:

> Poet appointed dare not decline
> to walk among the bogus, nothing to authenticate
> the mission imposed, despised
> by toadies, confidence men, kept boys
> shopped and jailed, cleaned out by whores,
> touching acquaintance for food and tobacco.

In this mood, "secret, solitary, a spy":

> He lies with one to long for another,
> sick, self-maimed, self-hating,
> obstinate, mating
> beauty with squalor to beget lines still-born.[92]

The constant objective, however, is above both these moods - to first of all convert experience, physical and mental, into verbal

music, which is itself the creation of mood. (In the words of the poem just after the Aneurin/Taliesin passage, "it is time to consider how Domenico Scarlatti/condensed so much music into so few bars"[93]). If this sounds like aestheticism, any section of the poem will illustrate that it is the opposite. The poem's semantic (though not narrative or explanatory) content is everywhere dense and concrete and emerges from the landscape of Northumbria. There is no desire to restore this landscape to some past wildness or retreat from modern life into its isolation, though there is the very strong desire to use its reality in creating the emotion of Briggflatts. This emotion has much to do with a personal love that is characterised through a detailed, particular location, mapped in time as well as in space. My last quotation is intended to show how the collapsing of history ("Then is diffused in Now"), as long as it is not done to obscure the effects of change or subvert the urgency of present problems, can be a valid technique in poetry:

> Shepherds follow the links,
> sweet turf studded with thrift:
> fell-born men of precise instep
> leading demure dogs
> from Tweed and Till and Teviotdale,
> with hair combed back from the muzzle,
> dogs from Redesdale and Coquetdale
> taught by Wilson or Telfer.
> Their teeth are white as birch,
> slow under black fringe
> of silent, accurate lips.
> The ewes are heavy with lamb.
> Snow lies bright on Hedgehope
> and tacky mud about Till
> where the fells have stepped aside
> and the river praises itself,
> silence by silence sits
> and Then is diffused in Now.[94]

The reader is in the culturally and geographically detailed location that Bunting has chosen for his "sonata" on love and death - his form of meditation on time.

The King Offa of Mercian Hymns (1971), Geoffrey Hill tells us in his notes to the poems, might "most usefully be regarded as the

presiding genius of the West Midlands"[95]. The first line of Mercian Hymns begins with that area's rock and vegetation, "the perennial holly-groves, the riven sand-stone", as though to delineate the physical base and location of the cultural exploration that is to follow. In "The Crowning of Offa", a similarly physical basis is established for the autobiographical/historical bonding of the sequence's persona: "I was invested in mother-earth, the crypt of roots and endings. Child's play. I abode there, bided my time .."[96] As in the opening address (quoted in full above, p 199) with its theme of the unbroken importance of money and the historical changes in the landscape brought about by human labour, so here humanity is "invested" and, consistent with the experience of control and potency traditionally shared by Kings and children (think of Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill") the persona is said to bide his time. His emergence from the earth is grub-like in its purposefulness and indifference to existing culture whether "barbaric" or refined ("scrollwork"):

> I wormed my way heavenward
> for ages amid barbaric ivy, scrollwork[97]
> of fern,

In "Offa's Coins", this native earthiness is pictured in the rooting snout of the boar:

> Crepitant oak forest where the boar
> furrowed black mould, his snout intimate[98]
> with worms and leaves.

At a more generalised level, the natural imagery is soon extended to historical experience. The whole sequence is full of fragments sinking back into the earth - coins, brooches, bits of broken toys, "splinters of habitation". Later in "Offa's Coins", anything so buried is transformed into treasure:

> Their spades grafted through the
> variably-resistant soil. They clove to
> the hoard. They ransacked epiphanies,
> vetebrae of the chimera, armour of
> wild bees' larvae. [99]

The fecundity of autumn, rich and rotting, the "golden and stinking blaze", re-absorbs and re-bonds the artificial and natural:

> The garden festers for attention:
> telluric cultures enriched with shards,
> corms, nodules, the sunk solids of
> gravity. I have accrued a golden
> and stinking blaze.[100]

Culture pictured as a deepening thickness of earth and mould, teeming with animal and plant life, is an essential metaphor in Mercian Hymns. The creatures are earthy:snails, wood-lice, compost worms, wasp grubs and bee-larvae; there are moles, badgers[101], boars, addors, frogs, crayfish and eels and the plant-life is the indigenous one of ancient heath, wood-land or marsh - holly, charlock, marsh-marigold, wattle, pear, catmint, apple, mistletoe, ivy, nettles, chestnuts, hemlock, thorn, scutch-grass, yew, privet, crab-apple, strawberry. Historical connectedness is not nostalgic, but literally organic. We see history as the prolific, but decaying reality around us and the narration of history as an account of the operation of power. The poem's persona is multiple, probing and suggestive, as it moves fluidly through its metamorphoses. Here is "The Kingdom of Offa", quoted in full, followed by comments intended to clarify the function of merging an heroic and cruel part of history with present experience, both personal and social:

> Gasholders, russet among fields, Milldams, marlpools
> that lay unstirring. Eel-swarms. Coagulations of
> frogs: once, with branches and half-bricks, he
> battered a ditchful; then sidled away from the
> stillness and silence.
>
> Ceolred was his friend and remained so, even after
> the day of the lost fighter: a biplane, already
> obsolete and irreplaceable, two inches of heavy
> snub silver. Ceolred let it spin through a hole
> in the classroom-floorboards, softly, into the
> rat-droppings and coins.
>
> After school he lured Ceolred, who was sniggering
> with fright, down to the old quarries, and flayed
> him. Then, leaving Ceolred, he journeyed for hours,
> calm and alone, in his private derelict sandlorry
> named Albion.[102]

The preceding poems, with their early memories of coronation celebrations, coach outings and the childhood territory of playground and cloakroom, have prepared the reader for the precise recollections of childhood here. The sense of guilt disowned after the frog-battering ("then sidled away from the stillness and silence"), echoed in the childish vengefulness over the lost model plane, merge smoothly into the cruelty of Offa: the treasure of the biplane ("obsolete and irreplaceable, two inches of heavy snub silver") spinning into the rat-droppings and coins immediately links with Offa's money, which stands for his power. In "Offa's Coins" the moneyers who have displeased Offa become "swathed bodies in the long ditch; one eye upstaring". Like Offa, the school-friend Ceolred who is lured to the old quarries where he is "flayed", occupies present and past simultaneously. As in "Offa's Journey to Rome" where the motorist is able to separate himself, through the mechanical isolation and power of his car, from the responsibilities of a road accident ("His maroon GT chanted then overtook. He lavished on the high valleys its haleine".), so here the "private derelict sandlorry named Albion" represents a Kingdom magically and egocentrically free of social connections. Blamefree lunacy and indifference, associated with coin, treasure and fertility, persist from Offa's day into the present. Some of the hymns re-cast the theme into a modern Forsyte setting - "the three mute great-aunts borne away down St Chad's Garth in a stiff-backed Edwardian Rolls".[103] In "Offa's Laws"[104], it is the directorial cigar that now threatens malefactors, though the country home near Malvern with its orchard and hammer-pond shimmering with trout-fry maintains the sequence's basic dependence on rural imagery and symbolism. The "elves' wergild, the true governance of England"[105] has clearly become a class concern with weighty legitimation preserving power:

> Processes of generation; deeds of settlement.
> The urge to marry well; wit to invest
> in the properties of healing-springs. Our
> children and our children's children,
> o my masters. [106]

Complementing this bourgeois experience is working-class labour. The ancient, rich embroidery of "Opus Anglicanorum" was worked in "treacherous thread" of gold and silver by people who "trudged out of the dark, scraping their boots free from lime-splodges and phlegm. They munched cold bacon".[107] In modern times, this labour appears in the setting of the Black Country nailshop. The harshness of the grand-mother's work is filtered through Ruskin's criticism of industrialisation:

> Brooding on the eightieth letter of Fors
> Clavigera. I speak this in memory of
> my grandmother, whose childhood and
> prime womanhood were spent in the
> nailer's darg. [108]

The Hymns began with a quotation from Sisson re-affirming, however we are distracted by technical questions of means, the coincidence of personal and social integrity: "the conduct of governments rests upon the same foundations and encounters the same difficulties as the conduct of private persons". The sequence concludes with the personal identified with the historical (or social) once more:

> ... Gran lit the gas, his dice
> whirred in the Indo-cup, he entered into the last
> dream of Offa the King.

And the final words:

> And it seemed, while we waited, he began to walk to-
> wards us he vanished
>
> he left behind coins, for his lodging, and traces of
> red mud. [110]

The "presiding genius of the West Midlands", ironically expressed in the religious imagery of the resurrected Christ, leaves behind the tangible substances of money and red mud. I have only been following two of the themes of these very resonant poems, both of which re-appear very strikingly in this last line. The sense of historical continuity is, then, not an escape ("things have always been

the same, human nature will never change") but an attempt to understand, and by implication control, the present in terms of the past. The child's delight in war-time evenings ("The wireless boomed its commands. I loved the battle-anthems and the gregarious news.// Then, in the earthy shelter, warmed by a blue-glassed storm-lantern, I huddled with stories of dragon-tailed airships and warriors who took wing immortal as phantoms".[111]) is over-lain by adult perspectives and knowledge. It is all looked full in the face, just as the use of Offa is not simple romanticism or simple condemnation. Part of our child-like view of ancient history remains, counter-balanced by sobering insights into its dynamics, but both serve a more penetrating over-all effect. Jon Silkin, in his useful essay, "The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill", points to Hill's understanding of the way people are implicated in history, as tourists, voyeurs, participators. He quotes these lines from "Ovid in the Third Reich" (King Log, 1968):

> I have learned one thing: not to look down
> So much upon the damned. [112]

The Hymns, mining autobiographical and shared cultural experience, are a kind of "mirror for magistrates" although their strength lies in their lack of didacticism. Like Ted Hughes, Hill enters treacherous territory, for England's ancient landscapes, pre-Norman history, local industrial archaeology, are all highly susceptible to the escapist treatment Hill avoids. He is equally wary of indulging in anti-pastoral or "shock versions" of history, preferring to see inter-connectedness and continuity:

> Coiled entrenched England: brickwork
> and paintwork stalwart above stalwart
> marl. The clashing primary colours -
> 'Ethandune', 'Catraeth', 'Maldon',
> 'Pengwern'. Steel against yew and
> privet. Fresh dynasties of smiths.

Anglo-Saxon battles have become the names of suburban houses stalwartly erected "above hacked marl". The warrior imagery is

humorously continued with "the clashing primary colours" and steel hedge-clippers of the housing estate and its inhabitants - the "fresh dynasties of Smiths". This, it seems to me, is an appropriately suggestive way of writing about the historical determinants of "coiled, entrenched England" and its culture. The next poem, "The Kingdom of Offa", deals with cultural continuity with the same sureness: the excitement of the charabanc outing is approached through the gentle, mock-heroic stirring of popular notions of Camelot. Throughout the book, Hill follows the "tracks of ancient occupation" left on present-day West Mercia. He has scrutinised the cultural identity of an English locality and has used the imagery of history to approach its contemporary situation and character.

(v) Political commitment in nature and rural poetry: towards MacDiarmid

The simplest "committed" approach to nature and rural poetry is to treat it as hopelessly corrupted, a category beyond redemption to be exposed and discarded. Taking this view, Douglas Dunn goes a stage further than Brecht (see above p 8). His poem "Socialist Nature" sets out to discover the full cost of our habitual ways of looking at Nature. He begins:

> Money was spent to make the world like this.
> All the things of the world have been sold.
> This precious landscape strains its loneliness
> Through ideologies. What it means is
> Lookers must forget land is a price.

In the second verse, traditional "nature emotion" is replaced by Coriolanian determination:

> Wet eyes before
> A sunset or a wide view of low hills -
>
> An antique bridge, a spire, mansion turrets -
> And I almost weep that this most beautiful
> Enemy is not on my side, nor neutral.[115]

For Dunn, "Nature is our eyes, and what we make/with them" and the Nature we make stands between ourselves and "a better world". He is

asking for more than just land. He is asking us to acknowledge and repay the human cost of our idea of "natural" beauty: we must erase, not liberate. If only things were as simple as that, it is a price we might willingly pay.

The same effort to demote the category or mode itself occurs in Eagleton's essay "Myth and History in Recent Poetry" in which myth, an essential mode for the nature poetry of Ted Hughes, is weighed against legend and is found to offer merely mystifying solutions to historical contingencies. In the essay, Eagleton has little difficulty in disposing of Donald Davie's Essex Poems[116], a volume of relaxed indulgence from a normally accomplished and subtle writer. Eagleton neatly shows the avoidance tactics and prevarication of Davie's myth of transcendence, though he only glances at the more significant case of Black Mountain ideology which achieves "a kind of global liberation won at the possible cost of a reverence for routine causality".[117] As the essay develops, the argument tightens. Whereas "examining modern experience through myth, in the case of poets like Gunn, Creagh and Montgomery, takes the form of timeless universalisations achieved through symbol and archetype, 'legend' works in an opposite direction, excavating the substance of a specific time and place remote from ours, salvaging it for re-inhabitation". Legend "is still able to accommodate a sense of historicity, in ways which myth isn't".[118] Analysing the last verse of Thom Gunn's "Loot", Eagleton identifies "a sub-Lawrentian myth of the individual as passive transmitter of primordial forces which fill and possess him with their own richness". Such a "primitivistic vision emphasises man's rootedness in the cosmos: it offers - in my view, in a mystifying and merely assertive way - a natural solution to social breakdown".[119] Our present sense of estrangement from the universe, or the possibility of our reintegration, is explained mythically without reference to historical accounts of alienation. Furthermore,

says Eagleton, myth throws up individuals with "a freshly representative significance"[120] unrestricted by the contingencies of time and space, with history as their kingdom: in this "compensatory" myth, we get false solutions to actual problems. For Eagleton, like Dunn weeping that "nature emotion" is not on his side, myth has become the enemy and must be rejected on ideological grounds.

Eagleton is right to criticise myth as falsification, just as pastoral must be attacked when it behaves as realism, but myth can also be imaginatively progressive. Mutations and anti-heroes like Hughes's Crow and Nicholas Lumb, with their oblique relationships to social reality, actually satirise fantasy solutions and transcendency. Hints of the truly anti-human and falsifying solutions of, say, parts of Lawrence's mythology, have been absent from Hughes' work for over twenty years. Eagleton's timely criticisms of the use of myth in Gunn and Davie have hardened into a dogmatic against myths <u>per se</u>. It is true that certain modes have a better chance of communicating with a given audience than others (in this respect myth may actually be a more progressive mode than legend), but every mode has several aspects: realism, for example, can foster a sensuous attachment to present reality which it may take the self-conscious narrator in the contemporary novel or the stripping away of the fictional casing in a Beckett play to dispel, and apparently engaged realism can easily be used for effective escape into a fully self-referential world: "Coronation Street" soon became an urban pastoral.

Neither Dunn nor Eagleton finds the right kind of polemical practice: Eagleton's article is on myth <u>and</u> legend but all the poetry he quotes is mythical and negatively characterised. The case for legend is assumed, not made. And Dunn's misplaced rationalism might more convincingly have been channelled into anti-pastoral. Dramatised protest poetry, manifesto-style criticism, a positive

backing of other modes of writing would, I feel, have done more justice to the structure of feeling within which Dunn and Eagleton were writing.

Seamus Heaney's nature poetry provides a further challenge to Dunn and Eagleton's position, for Heaney writes as an "inner émigré". He assumes that redemption and reclamation are his business and that the body and nature of the Irish countryside are essential material for poetry in his historical and cultural situation. He takes up an ambivalent attitude to the aesthetics of commitment, wanting always to dig deeper than the known analysis that follows from an identifiable position. This is certainly not the only literary response to political crisis, but the interesting and valuable thing in Heaney is his avoidance of any kind of escapism: his liberal scepticism cannot be simply annexed by the Right or dismissed by the Left.

As an Irish writer, Heaney can turn to rural experience and still remain very obviously engaged with contemporary social and political issues. Indeed, an excellent poem like "At a Potato Digging"[121] exposes the bitter appropriateness of contemporary agricultural or natural imagery to the political history of Ireland. Certainly, in poems such as "The Diviner" and "Docker" in Death of a Naturalist (1966) and "The Forge" and "Thatcher" in Door into the Dark (1969), he might be charged with romanticising the rural work and craftsmanship of which he had direct personal experience in his Derry childhood, but the main impact of his early poetry may be ascribed to the clarity with which he presents that rural childhood. There are few pleasant fantasies here: his experience of nature, often frightening and full of the pressures exerted by the outside world, or "nature", on his own hopes and desires, is presented in direct symbolic terms. The sensuous detail of the language in Death of a Naturalist indicates the richness of Heaney's imaginative reserves: a plucked

turkey is "just another poor forked thing,/A skin bag plumped with inky putty"[122] and in "Death of a Naturalist" the frogs invading the flax-dam are described thus:

> The air was thick with a bass chorus.
> Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked
> On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
> The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
> Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
> I sickened, turned, and ran.[123]

Later he extends the child's Wordsworthian fusion of wonder and dread into mature meditations on the state of Ireland herself.

Heaney's poetic method, consciously Wordsworthian[124], begins with the personal ordering of memory:

> I was aware that my inspiration, for
> want of a better word, lay in the
> energies that sprang from remembering.[125]

In "Digging"[126] he determines to dig with his pen just as his father and grandfather dug with spades; in many other poems he consciously quarries the experience of his father and family or the older heroic figures of his childhood. It is a short step to the public excavation of Ireland that Heaney has carried out in other poems, particularly the "bog poems" of Wintering Out (1972) and North (1975). These poems of externalised feeling are as forcefully imaginative as his more personal poems and have the same direct symbolic power. In a comment on "Bogland", the last poem in Door into the Dark, a poem about the accumulated relics in the bottomless wet centre of Ireland[127], Heaney explained:

> 'Bogland' is an attempt to make the preserving, shifting marshes of Ireland a mythical landscape, a symbol of the preserving, shifting consciousness of the Irish people. History is the soft ground that holds and invites us into itself, century after century.[128]

At worst, Heaney pursues this to the hocus pocus extreme of an article that appeared in The Listener of 7 December 1972.

Seemingly taking his cue from Ted Hughes's cultural theory of Calvinism* Heaney saw "very satisfactory imaginative parallels

* See below p 287

to the history of Ireland at the moment" in vegetarian cults involving human sacrifice in Iron Age Europe. At best, Heaney comments more historically:

> ... when I think about my territory and my hinterland and my past I am thinking in terms of Ireland as a whole and the history of the famine and the rebellion. Within Northern Ireland having that set of myths for yourself and your nation is what it means to be a Catholic.[129]

In the "bog poems" themselves, these rather loose notions are exchanged for firm images and emotions linking past and present - the "hooded victim,/slashed and dumped"[130] in "The Grauballe Man" or, most strikingly, the dead adulteress in "Punishment". Her 2,000 year old body, found in a Jutland bog, the face blackened through the action of water and the head shaved, suggests the tarred and feathered girls humiliated in Derry and Belfast:

> I who have stood dumb
> when your betraying sisters,
> cauled in tar,
> wept by the railings,
>
> who would connive
> in civilized outrage
> yet understand the exact
> and tribal, intimate revenge.[131]

Some reductionism and sentimental blurring of unresolved conflicts must be admitted here ("My poor scapegoat//I almost love you/but would have cast, I know,/The stones of silence"[132]), but the poem's dominant emotion, its conniving civilised outrage mixed with a guilty understanding of revenge, arises from Heaney's representative position in everyday experience. It is "the rituals of co-existence" and the constant flow of specific and contradictory feeling that his poetry dramatises. A fine example of this is the poem "Whatever you say, say nothing"[133]. As in "Punishment", this poem's contextualisation (in its criticism of voyeurism) works at a political level - these are Irish problems within an Irish destiny.

Seamus Heaney's view of literature does avoid commitment in the sense of active support and "message"[134]; his view is held in full

knowledge of the paradox that his literary/emotional response to an horrific fact[135] is best mediated through "cool" historical material. (It is the use of sensitivity to change that counts in a writer.) Heaney never retreats into this position: his involvement is not in question though he does avoid the unproductive agonising a mainland poet might have to work through. At the end of North he describes himself thus:

> I am neither internee nor informer;
> An inner émigré, grown long-haired
> And thoughtful; a wood-kerne
>
> Escaped from the massacre,
> Taking protective colouring[136]
> From bole and bark ...

In three poems towards the end of Wintering Out (1972) - "Maighdean Mara", "Limbo" and "Bye-Child"[137] - his humanist position is justified through full identification with the suffering around:

> I'm cauterized, a black stump of home.[138]

Heaney is liberal but deeply aware. He identifies with Everyman and uses poetry as a way of revealing common experience - whether in the early childhood and nature poems or in the later work where the natural landscapes of Ireland are used to explore present reality imaginatively and suggestively. The last piece in North, the six-poem autobiographical sequence "Singing School"[139], shows how penetrating this exploration can be. It is an acute political poem, though it refuses alignment or a theoretical over-view in favour of concrete detail and recollection: consider No 3,"Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966" as an example. In his latest book, Field Work (1979), the values and tones of Robert Lowell are present; in a poem like "Ugolino"[140], the final one in the book and a translation from Dante, Heaney's scope and range have perceptibly widened. The values of liberal scepticism are seen to be far from exhausted. Nature is still important in some parts of the book, but it is significant that nature is playing a decreasing part in Heaney's

increasingly assured political poetry.

(vi) The materialist poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid

As poets of material nature, three contemporary names come to mind - Charles Tomlinson, Jon Silkin and Hugh MacDiarmid. Tomlinson, who is probably better known in the USA than in England, is an accomplished, conservative writer, impressive technically and intellectually and very much interested in the aesthetic aspects of nature-presence, form, space, texture, colour. The following recent poem (quoted complete) illustrates some of these interests and also speaks for Tomlinson's generally mundane structure of feeling. He is too wary and too good to lose himself in neo-Georgianism, but the Augustan measures of the poem, its general aestheticism and its parodic Shakespearian finale all substitute for close contact with the rural material and its context:

> The air at evening thickens with a scent
> That walls exude and dreams turn lavish on -
> Dark incense of a solar sacrament
> Where, laid in swathes, the field-silk dulls
> and dries
> To contour out the land's declivities
> With parallels of grass, sweet avenues:
> Scent hangs perpetual above the changes,
> As when the hay is turned and we must lose
> This clarity of sweeps and terraces
> Until the bales space out the slopes again
> Like scattered megaliths. Each year the men
> Pile them up close before they build the stack,
> Leaving against the sky, as night comes on,
> A henge of hay-bales to confuse the track
> Of time, and out of which the smoking dews
> Draw odours solid as the huge deception.[141]

As a contemplative poet or as a kind of contemporary imagist, Tomlinson no doubt deserves attention, but I do not feel that his poetry offers any significant dimension, critical or cultural, to the concerns of this thesis.

In Jon Silkin's nature poetry, there is an earnest attempt to draw poetry back towards natural science. At first sight he appears to offer precisely the kind of materialist nature poetry

to which I was alluding in my Introduction*. Silkin deliberately titled his fourth book Nature with Man, implying in that "with" the essential connections stressed by Sebastiano Timpanaro[142]. But the book, to me, explores very little: it fails to find any "common denominator that will pull together these two kinds of life"[143](flowers and humanity). When I compare Silkin's nature poetry with the humanity and poetic power of his most famous piece, "Death of a Son (who died in a mental hospital, aged one)", I conclude that specifically human situations suit his talents better. Like Tomlinson, Silkin is always rewarding to read - he is a serious, careful, writer - but in a poem like "Dandelion" (quoted below in full), he does not actually make imaginative advances nor does he bear out the claim made in the notes that the poem "sees its subject as a seizer of space, and asks for political parallels to be made".[145] Silkin carries out his observation responsibly, using both poetic and botanical language; the rewards are certainly there (particularly the image of the dandelion leaves as "riveted" into the earth) but there is no crystallisation or concentration in the poem, such as one finds, for example, in Ted Hughes's "Snowdrop".[146] Here is "Dandelion":

> Slugs nestle where the stem
> Broken, bleeds milk.
> The flower is eyeless: the sight is compelled
> By small, coarse, sharp petals,
> Like metal shreds. Formed,
> They puncture, irregularly perforate
> Their yellow, brutal glare.
> And certainly want to
> Devour the earth. With an ample movement
> They are a foot high, as you look.
> And coming back, they take hold
> On pert domestic strains.
> Others' lives are theirs. Between them
> And domesticity,
> Grass. They infest its weak land;
> Fatten, hide slugs, infestate.
> They look like plates; more closely
> Like the first tryings, the machines, of nature
> Riveted into her, successful.[147]

* See above page 16.

Tomlinson and Silkin are original enough to make contemporary neo-Georgian poets seem like mere bearers of ideology, but in Hugh MacDiarmid one encounters a major poet. In the terms of this thesis, MacDiarmid has shown a practical, positive engagement with social change and he has also consciously "placed" poetry's metaphysical function in relationship to other functions of the art. In discussing MacDiarmid as a poet of the natural and rural world I am not trying to absorb such an essentially Scottish writer into an English tradition. I do, however, want to point to MacDiarmid's affinities with many of the other poets discussed in this thesis, to illustrate the distinctive development of his own use of nature.

MacDiarmid's achievements as a committed poet were mostly published between 1926 and 1935 (I would single out the Lenin poems and "Lo! a child is born" as among the finest of these), but like Picasso's, his art is also remarkable for its virtuosity and diversity. It is no surprise that "the characteristic attitude" of Britain's greatest socialist poet should be identified by Leavis as "that of the inspired poet - the nobly indignant genius - of the Romantic tradition"[148], as MacDiarmid himself often discusses the imagination in Romantic terms:

> ... the principal question
> Aboot a work o' art is frae hoo deep
> A life it springs - and syne hoo faur
> Up frae't it has the poo'er to leap.
>
> And hoo muckle it lifts up wi'it
> Into the sunlicht like a saumon there,
> Universal Spring![149]

For MacDiarmid, "consciousness springs frae unplumbed deeps". He speaks "o' a wilder fount than they (most men) daur watch/Free-springin' in its native force/Against the darkness o' its source".[150]

In "The War with England", referring to his life on the lonely island of Whalsay, MacDiarmid accepts his time in the wilderness as

an opportunity to come to terms with himself before re-entering the world re-charged and more able to intervene productively in its affairs:

> I was better with the sounds of the sea
> Than with the voices of men
> And in desolate and desert places
> I found myself again.
> For the whole of the world came from these ...[151]

The tendencies towards Romanticism are notable. In common with Eliot, Yeats and Pound, we can also see MacDiarmid (though it is a very partial picture) as an elitist, a late Romantic with a near-religious belief in Genius, High Culture and a Global Civilisation of the Intellect.[152] He agrees with Lenin that "communism becomes an empty phrase, a mere facade and the Communist a mere bluffer, if he has not <u>worked over in his consciousness</u> the whole inheritance of human knowledge".[153] Certainly, his theoretical Marxism has its eye on the withering of the state and harmonious anarchy so that true human individuality may emerge at last, free of the stunting relationships of capitalist production[154]. He is a "Bolshevik before the Revolution" but not when Bolshevism is ruling the roost[155], which is a way of insisting on the primacy of a personal point of view. In no way does any of this make a case against MacDiarmid's consistent devotion to social reform, though it may help one to understand both the wide diversity of his achievement and the paradox of his involvement with nature poetry as metaphysics.

In the first part of my discussion of MacDiarmid's poetry of the natural and rural, I want to indicate the abundance of his response and the sense of effortlessness that it gives. The lyrics from the Twenties have a quality, characteristic of folk-lore or of, for example, medieval religious art and literature, of combining the mystical and the familiar:[156]

> The skinklan' stars [shining
> Are but distant dirt.[157]

Or, in the Imagist mode:

> The moonbeams Kelter i' the lift, [undulate
> An' Earth, the bare auld stane,
> Glitters beneath the seas o' Space
> White as a mammoth's bane.[158]

In a poem like "The Watergaw",[159] the look on a dying person's face is permanently and mysteriously associated with "a watergaw wi' its chitterin' licht" (indistinct rainbow, shivering light), seen "ae weet forenicht i' the yow-trummle" (wet early evening, cold weather after sheep-shearing). Hardy might well have envied such a direct and economic fusion of a profound emotion and a particular atmospheric mood in nature.[160]

For MacDiarmid, Scotland itself is a reservoir of natural experience and poetry as an art is either automatically religious ("As a poet I'm interested in religious ideas"[161]) or it competes openly with religion for spiritual experience:

> In truth, it is ridiculous to call even the nominally believing poets religious ... The fact is that there has been, and remains, an unbroken enmity between religion and art ...[162]

Even in his most virulent attacks on the Church or in the rarer moments when he attacks Christian doctrine itself (as in "First Hymn to Lenin"), MacDiarmid is never reductionist. He does not want to deny any of the sense of wonder that religious thought may have crystallised, though he is always scornful of the mystification and mis-use of religion in the tangled affairs of Church and State. The short poem "At the Graveside", in fact, points up the vanity of those who witlessly explain "huge conundrums":

> There is no stupid soul who neither knows
> The rudiments of human history
> Nor seeks to solve the problems of this life
> But still must give his witless testimony
> On huge conundrums - Faithless in small things,
> Let all such cease their fond imaginings.
> The eyes of fools are on the ends of God.
> I postpone all such thoughts beneath this sod.[163]

That postponement is ironical, but it is also an act of reverence.

In religious terms it is a weighty challenge to those who have constructed an omnipotent God from the human life of Christ. The chimera hunted by MacDiarmid from the mid-1930's onwards, that process of "making one's own the treasures of human knowledge", might with advantage have seemed further off had MacDiarmid meditated more often on his own poem, "Light and Darkness". Here, individual attempts at comprehensiveness are dwarfed by history:

> May I never lose these shadowy glimpses of unknown thoughts
> That modify and minify my own, and never fail
> To keep some shining sense of the way all thoughts at last
> Before life's dawning meaning like the stars at sunrise pale.[164]

In "Whuchulls", he asks:

> What is oor life that we should prize't abune
> Lichen's or slug's o' which we ken scarce mair
> Than they o' oors when a' thing's said and dune ...[165]

Furthermore, his belief in poetry as a creative absolute is not coincidentally expressed in apocalyptic language:

> Poetry is human existence come to life,
> The glorious energy that once employed
> Turns all else in creation null and void,
> The flower and fruit, the meaning and goal ...[166]

Once recognised, this basic religiosity associates itself very naturally with MacDiarmid's love of detail and difference and variety:

> I find inexhaustible riches in the life of everyday
> Nothing is ever commonplace to me that is imbued with life.[167]

The writer cannot afford preconceptions or the blur of familiarity and generalisation:

> We must look at the harebell as if
> We had never seen it before.[168]

The "naming" and "categorising" that characterises so much of In Memoriam James Joyce works particularly well when, for example, MacDiarmid is writing a kind of "found" sound poem using the old Narn expressions for "the various names/Applied to all the restless movements of the sea"[169] and there is considerable appeal too in his listing of the qualities and origins of different woods in "The World of Words"[170]. MacDiarmid's later work does become indiscriminate (to David Craig it ends in "a vast graveyard of ideas"[171]), but this "poetry of facts" does yield precise, scientific writing, like "On the Ocean Floor" or "To a Friend and Fellow-Poet" or "Dytiscus"[172] or the "haemolytic streptococcus" comparison[173] in In Memoriam James Joyce. Throughout his work MacDiarmid has, with similar ease, made fine symbolic and emblematic use of ordinary elements and organisms - stone, water, trees, plants, fish, birds. His creative control is assured and his responses to nature are integrated and undifferentiated, so that MacDiarmid can illustrate through nature without, like the self-deceived "nature poet", purporting to explore it[174]. "Crystals like Blood" shows this. The poem is "about" its last six lines:

> So I remember how mercury is got
> When I contrast my living memory of you
> And your dear body rotting here in the clay
> - And feel once again released in me
> The bright torrents of felicity, naturalness and faith
> My treadmill memory draws from you yet.[175]

The previous twenty-one lines work on the nature of the mercury ore - its heaviness, its roughness ("one face was caked/With brown limestone"), its precise colour and crystalline variety; and the process of extracting the mercury - the iron machinery, the mechanical force, the relentless, dumb intensity and the marvellous scale and purposiveness of the operation. But alongside this an

emotional mood is plotted out: the poem begins with an old, personal memory and the uncanny intimations of "crystals like blood in a broken stone". Then a "broken chunk of bed-rock" is turned over ruminatively in the hand, before the stone-works are described with their marching, pounding "double ring of iron piledrivers/Like the multiple legs of a fantastically symmetrical spider ..." Out of this grim earthiness the bright mercury is released. The last six lines weave all these aspects into a single, profound emotion of life, death, decay and salving memory.

The "hawthorn" passage in In Memoriam James Joyce, though in the less structured, slacker manner of that poem (the line "Even at considerable distance" is wilfully matter-of-fact and anti-lyrical), achieves a similarly fine synthesis of nature, in this case the "ruddily bright" haws, and idea - the durability of poetry:

> And when the leaves have passed
> Or only in a few tatters remain
> The tree to the winter condemned
> Stands forth at last
> Not bare and drab and pitiful,
> But a candelabrum of oxidised silver gemmed
> By innumerable points of ruby
> Which dominate the whole and are visible
> Even at considerable distance
> As flame-points of living fire.
> That so it may be
> With my poems too at last glance
> Is my only desire. [176]

(One is familiar with this striking, emblematic blooming, which is both physical and mystical, from the passage on the General Strike in "A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle"[177] : there, the rose leaping from "the thistle's ugsome guise" directly recalls "The Dream of the Rood").

"On a Raised Beach"[178] takes this synthesis of nature and thought further than any of MacDiarmid's other poems. In it, MacDiarmid comes closest to those poets who have used nature for metaphysical enquiry, but simultaneously he tests to breaking-point

the tension between this enquiry and the stony, material conditions of life. In "The World of Words", he put this tension in blunt, personal terms:

> I fancy the manner I have allowed
> My natural impulses towards romance and mysticism
> To dominate me has led to the formation
> Of a curious gap or "lacuna"
> Between the innate and almost savage realism,
> Which is a major element in my nature,
> And the imaginative, poetical cult
> Whereby I have romanticised and idealised my life.
> In this realistic mood I recognise
> With a grim animal acceptance
> That it is indeed likely enough that the 'soul'
> Perishes everlastingly with the death of the body,
> But what this realistic mood, into which
> My mind falls like a plummet
> Through the neutral zone of its balanced doubt,
> Never for one single beat of time can shake or disturb
> Is my certain knowledge,
> Derived from the complex vision of everything in me,
> That the whole astronomical universe, however illimitable
> Is only one part and parcel of the mystery of Life;
> Of this I am as certain as I am certain that I am I.
> The astronomical universe is <u>not</u> all there is.[179]

"On a Raised Beach" is a very earnest poem. Its tone and manner are initially unappealing, yet its ratiocination, imaged in the "stupendous cairn" of shingle flung up by the sea, is a careful and consistent statement of the full implications of MacDiarmid's intellectual position. The style of "On a Raised Beach" seems almost deliberately uncongenial, but once absorbed the poem soon appears as an obvious monument of modern literature.

The poem, arguing that stones, not bread, are the unpalatable, philosophical reality, is fittingly harsh in its thinking and diction. It speaks with the grimmest of conviction. MacDiarmid turns the lights of science and history on human hopes and pretensions with lugubrious authority:

> Though, of course, I still keep an open mind,
> A mind as open as the grave ...[180]

There is no way out through style or philosophising, as the poem builds up its impression of an overwhelming, unsympathetic reality

("all is lithogenesis"). The pebbles that the great Athenian orator Demosthenes placed in his mouth to cure his stammer, become a grotesque gargantuan image of the facts of existence negating human falsifications:

> And all who speak glibly may rest assured
> That to better their oratory they will have the whole earth
> For a Demosthenean pebble to roll in their mouths. [181]

I have argued earlier that MacDiarmid outflanks religion, maintaining a sense of agnostic wonder through exposing "fond imaginings" that reduce "huge conundrums" to the limitations of the human brain. "On a Raised Beach" takes a similar stance, while consciously subverting the Biblical frame of reference. Like Jacob or Joshua raising heaps of stones to mark great events, MacDiarmid creates his own vast raised beach of modern thought. He speaks as authoritatively as an Old Testament prophet: the tones of "I would scorn to cry" and "I would fain accept it all" refer to the isolation of the prophet and of Christ himself, in the wilderness of stones - like the barren shingle beach:

> Nothing has stirred
> Since I lay down this morning an eternity ago
> But one bird. [182]

There are more than a dozen quotations from the Bible [183] and several of the poem's themes build directly on biblical ideas. The most important of these are "the Christophanic rock that moved" on Easter Day and "bread from stones" with its dual associations with the Temptation and the Sermon on the Mount. The first is used in the poem's running, materialist challenge to idealism and religion, a challenge that the reader is still hoping to evade even at the end of the poem:

> 'Ah!' you say, 'if only one of these stones would move
> - Were it only an inch - of its own accord
> This is the resurrection we await,
> - The stone rolled away from the tomb of the Lord. [184]

In the second idea, corollary to the first, are the poem's political roots. The intellectual poet is brought back from an interesting speculation on de Bary's and Schwendener's discovery of the dual nature of lichens: "These bare stones bring me straight back to reality".[185] Such indecorous prompting is well-known in working-class experience, if not (and this is the poem's political point) in working-class consciousness:

> (The masses too have begged bread from stones,
> From human stones, including themselves,
> And only got it, not from their fellow-men,
> But from stones such as these here - if then.)[186]

Grasping the roughness of stone, MacDiarmid (like Wordsworth) is saved from "the abyss of idealism". The hard, inedible fruit of this philosophy, the poem holds, is better than falsely hoping for the miracle of bread from stones. Yet the poem's argument is refined; Creation is stupendous and holy and "God" is inscrutable:

> The moon moves the waters backwards and forwards.
> But the stones cannot be lured an inch further
> Either on this side of eternity or the other.
> Who thinks God is easier to know than they are?[187]

Furthermore, the poem's intellectual effort springs from a religious longing ("Bread from stones is my sole and desperate dearth")[188] though its placing of that desire severely curtails the mystifying, traditional social freedom of the Church. If the poem attacks the pivotal Christian concept of "the stone that moved", it also goes on audaciously to make its own challenge to Death and to assert, in revised scientific language, that Death has no sting, ("Death is a physical horror to me no more.")[189] As in the Christian concept of Death, we have nothing to lose but illusions, though here the illusions are reversed and a bitter political irony is added:

> And in death - unlike life - we lose nothing that is truly ours.[190]

To understand the development of the materialist argument of "On a Raised Beach", we must move on from MacDiarmid's manipulation of basically Christian ideas. (He does glance too at the mystical Islamic black stone in the sacred Caaba. Like "the Christophanic rock that moved", this stone also has supernatural properties: it was white on falling from Paradise with Adam but became black from the kisses of sinful, but faithful pilgrims.)

The next feature of the argument concerns the translation of the laws of the physical universe ("the ordered adjustments ... forever taking place on the Earth")[191] into poetic and metaphysical truths.

Like other modern nature poetry, this poem too traces both the variety and difference of the Creation and man's sense of alienation from those rhythms all other things seem to share.

Particularly in the poem's first two dozen lines, MacDiarmid's "poetry of facts" is brought in to meet the Duns Scotus/Hopkins "haecceity" around him. The colours and textures are desultorily categorised and he "glouts" (frowns) at his work; his tools seem inadequate, he feels "like a blind man" and his perception ("bringing my aesthesia in vain to bear" falters. The vast scope and intractability of the material seems to result in this necessary but false opening (like Eliot's "That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory":), though several fundamental themes are begun, including materialism's challenge to religion and the universality of the process of lithogenesis. These come together in the fine second line ("Carpolite fruit of the forbidden tree"), in which a Biblical myth is actually commandeered for service by materialism. MacDiarmid repeats this "fossil" conceit to seal his own materialist/scientific case, right at the end of "On a Raised Beach": his pioneering poem, apprentice to the open truths displayed in the

plain, popular (enchorial) "writing" on every stone, is characterised as a fossil flower scanning the Universe like an astronomical instrument. Like the "carpolite fruit", MacDiarmid's poetry too is subject to the universal process of lithogenesis.

The end of the poem is as obscured by technical terms from rhetoric as the opening is by mineralogical language and MacDiarmid does give one other muscular display of brash verbal energy (limbering up with psychological brow-beating and strenuous latinate exercises- "I must get into this stone world now./Ratchel, striae, relationships of tesserae ..." [192] -before some astonishing and short-lived shadow-boxing in Old Norse and the final collapse of "And lay my world in Kolgref"). But these passages are essentially alienating devices. In all the bluntness of the philosophical argument, we are not allowed to reduce, by analogy, the individual haecceity and variety of either the stones or human language and culture. Though Time reduces everything ("Not so much of all literature survives/As any wisp of scriota that thrives/ On a rock"), [193] we remain situated in time with "the humanity no culture has reached" and MacDiarmid does not mean his poem to justify withdrawal, the "infinite longing rather than manly will" of the Romantics. On the contrary, he calls the "intelligentsia" to its "impossible and imperative job".

The second traditional concern of "nature" poetry is man's alienation from those rhythms the rest of Nature seems to share. Here MacDiarmid indulges in a "prelapsarian" example of human spontaneity and adjustment to life, but one

> ... not yet as my Muse is, with this ampler scope,
> This more divine rhythm, wholly at one
> With the earth, riding the Heavens with it, as the stones do
> And all soon must. [194]

The whole drift of the poem, however, is to explain the sense of alienation in Marxian terms: we cannot be as the stones, because we prefer falsifications to the realities facing us. Near the end of the poem, in an illustration that acts as a political metaphor for mankind's social inhumanity as well as a description of our general alienation from Nature, MacDiarmid indicates that our unpreparedness for death is a mark of our alienation from the rhythms of Nature:

> - I lift a stone; it is the meaning of life I clasp
> Which is death, for that is the meaning of death;
> * * * * *
> So let us beware of death; the stones will have
> Their revenge; we have lost all approach to them,
> But soon we shall become as those we have betrayed,
> And they will seal us as fast in our graves
> As our indifference and ignorance seals them; [195]

The Romantic sense of alienation from modern life is still present ("It is a frenzied and chaotic age" and "We have lost the grounds of our being"),[196] but "On a Raised Beach" depicts the change-over from an individualistic/religious to a collectivist/materialist analysis of this alienation. In our Art and Literature we are so accustomed to the sensitive exploitation and enjoyment of the pain of alienation that we prefer it, perhaps, to the socialist re-integration that MacDiarmid is describing. In Huxley's Brave New World (and I don't mean to imply any parallel with socialist society) the price of a happier society was incomprehension before King Lear.

Ted Hughes, too, believes in the need for mankind to re-locate his sense of belonging in the Universe, and his work, in sticking to an imaginative exploration of contemporaneous life, avoids solutions that might be judged to be yet more falsification and mystification. "On a Raised Beach", however, goes a step beyond imaginative exploration. It breathes a rarer atmosphere; it is harsh, almost masochistic and frequently sounds notes of bitterness and

vindictiveness. But its almost inhuman tone and the withering of its enjoyment of variety and haecceity are only temporary: it is revolutionary in that its violence of sensibility is designed to facilitate a vision of a fuller life beyond the trivialised enslavement that MacDiarmid sees most men living in now. As nature poetry, it is unique in its rejection of mysticism and "moment" and obscure significance - all the characteristics of the Wordsworth to Hughes tradition - though if we become as the stones it does tell us that these things, freed of their false accretions, will be added to us again, once we are prepared to lose them:

> My disposition is towards spiritual issues
> Made inhumanly clear; I will have nothing interposed
> Between my sensitiveness and the barren but beautiful reality; [197]

This is not equivocation. Marx and Engels, discussing materialism as "the natural-born son of Great Britain" and Bacon, Hobbes and Locke as the fathers of the Enlightenment, claim that for historical reasons linked to the rise and maintenance of bourgeois prosperity, Britain thinks materialist but prefers to describe itself as agnostic or sceptic (terms elastic enough to include an unspecific religiosity). Engels gives a good example of the operation of this, when he remarks on how astonished foreign "freethinkers" visiting England in the middle of the nineteenth century were to find "that even geologists like Buckland and Mantell should contort the facts of their science so as not to clash too much with the myths of Genesis". MacDiarmid's feelings about "huge conundrums" are exactly paralleled in Engels:

> But nowadays in our evolutionary conception of the universe, there is absolutely no room for either a Creator or a Ruler, and to talk of a Supreme Being shut out from the whole existing world implies a contradiction in terms and, it seems to me, a gratuitous insult to the feelings of religious people. [198]

We may hypothesise that scientific progress, however much we feel that the unknown actually increases before it, may finally explain and leave the thing itself:

> But then come the Neo-Kantian agnostics and say: We may correctly perceive the qualities of a thing, but we cannot by any sensible or mental process grasp the thing-in-itself. This thing-in-itself is beyond our ken. To this Hegel, long since, has replied: If you know all the qualities of a thing, you know the thing itself; nothing remains but the fact that the said thing exists without us, and when your senses have taught you that fact you have grasped the last remnant of the thing-in-itself, Kant's celebrated, unknowable Ding an sich.[199]

For MacDiarmid, apart from the nature poet's strongly developed tendency to attribute significance,[200] "the fact that the said thing exists without us" is marvellous enough. He is religious in his humility before Nature - a truly devout materialist refusing the reductions of institutionalised religion.

Truth, then, in the context of the historical materialism "On a Raised Beach" seeks to explore, cannot be approached in the casuistic terms of Pilate's rhetorical question; on the contrary, Truth is philistine and brutally obvious:

> Do not argue with me. Argue with these stones.
> Truth has no trouble in knowing itself.
> This is it. The hard fact. The inoppugnable reality,
> Here is something for you to digest.[201]

All ideas are capable "of being replaced by other things" and:

> ... all the religious,
> All the material sacrifices and moral restraints,
> That in twenty thousand years have brought us no nearer God
> Are irrelevant to the ordered adjustments
> Out of the reach of perceptive understanding
> Forever taking place on the Earth and in the unthinkable regions around it;[202]

Stones become the ultimate reality, existing according to inerrable historical and scientific principles:

> But the world cannot dispense with the stones.
> They alone are not redundant. Nothing can replace them
> Except a new creation of God. [203]

And:

> Their sole concern is that what can be shaken
> Shall be shaken and disappear
> And only the unshakable be left. [204]

This stony dialectic, a natural metaphor that bridges social and natural science, leads us to the poem's fundamental commitment to a scientific point of view. The poet "must begin with these stones as the world began" for all the world's colour and variety are secondary:

> Varied forms and functions though life may seem to have shown
> They all come back to the likeness of stone, [205]

Ultimately we came from the stones, earth's oldest and most basic material, which is also "one with the stars". Their world is itself under-lain by material tension and change:

> And beneath them all a stupendous unity,
> Infinite movement visibly defending itself
> Against all the assaults of weather and water,
> Simultaneously mobilised at full strength
> At every point of the universal front,
> Always at the pitch of its powers,
> The foundation and end of all life. [206]

Human limitations show very clearly against this process. Men are flawed, proud and weak, while stones ("cold, undistracted, eternal and sublime") are the real protagonists - a feature of the poem that can easily lead to the bathos of "What have they not gone through already?" or "These stones have the silence of supreme creative power". [207] The boldest and most problematical feature of the poem is the attack on humanism. Usually the diplomatic mediator between contrary ideologies, humanism must here take its place in a larger universe:

What happens to us
Is irrelevant to the world's geology
But what happens to the world's geology
Is not irrelevant to us.
We must reconcile ourselves to the stones,
Not the stones to us.
Here a man must shed the encumbrances that muffle
Contact with elemental things, the subtleties
That seem inseparable from a humane life, and go apart
Into a simpler and sterner, more beautiful and more
oppressive world,
Austerely intoxicating. [208]

To "be ourselves without interruption,/Adamantine and inexorable",

to combat the "torments" of the age:

It will be ever increasingly necessary to find
In the interests of all mankind
Men capable of rejecting all that all other men
Think, as a stone remains
Essential to the world, inseparable from it,
And rejects all other life yet. [209]

Feeling and response are placed well below rationality:

Hot blood is of no use in dealing with eternity,
It is seldom that promises or even realisations
Can sustain a clear and searching gaze.
But an emotion chilled is an emotion controlled;
This is the road leading to certainty;
Reasoned planning for the time when reason can no longer avail.
It is essential to know the chill of all the objections
That come creeping into the mind, the battle between opposing
ideas
Which gives the victory to the strongest and most universal
Over all others, and to wage it to the end
With increasing freedom, precision, and detachment
A detachment that shocks our instincts and ridicules our desires. [210]

The Lenin poems praise just such qualities of control and clarity and detachment, but modified by the human figure of Lenin. This poem is more stark: the poet who in "The Second Hymn", "maun see in a'thing,/Ev'n what looks trumpery or horrid,/A subject equal to ony/ - A star for the forehead!" [211] must here beware of the fancies bred by "non-being", for "On a Raised Beach" is committed to issues beyond even life and death and the existential question of suicide - "It is reality that is at stake". [212] The poem's neglect, or criticism, of humanism is further compounded by its adoption of, and claimed preference for, the extra-human perspective of geological principles:

> I have still to see any manifestation of the human spirit
> That is worthy of a moment's longer exemption than it gets
> From petrifaction again - to get out if it can.
> All is lithogenesis - or lochia;[213]

As it is itself an artefact of the human world it minimises, one might well ridicule the poem, were it not for the artistic and philosophical success with which it debates reality. We are dwarfed and threatened as the poem strips away all mental and religious comforts; there is only stone, the materialist alternative to idealism, but may not things in themselves, to ask a question that is poetically valid and philosophically fallacious, be more wonderful without the subjective over-lay men provide?

> ... The widest open door is the least liable to intrusion
> Ubiquitous as the sunlight, unfrequented as the sun.
> The inward gates of a bird are always open.
> It does not know how to shut them.
> That is the secret of its song,
> But whether any man's are ajar is doubtful.
> I look at these stones and know little about them,
> But I know their gates are open too,
> Always open, far longer open, than any bird's can be,
> That every one of them has had its gates wide open far longer
> Than all birds put together, let alone humanity,
> Though through them no man can see,
> No man nor anything more recently born than themselves
> And that is everything else on the Earth.[214]

MacDiarmid's simultaneous religiosity and denial of religion is paralleled in his approach to nature. He is a fine poet of nature, as we have seen, but he is wary of nature as an institution or tradition:

> A pretty tribute to the old rural scene
> Can mark a base betrayal of mankind.[215]

"By Wauchopeside" clarifies the matter: the poem has precise and lively descriptions of nature and it shows full knowledge of poetry's unidentifiable debt to the world and the senses, yet its last comment is that there are more important things to do:

For civilization in its struggle up
Has mair than seasonal changes o' ideas,
Glidin' through periods o' flooers and fruit,
Winter and Spring again; to cope wi' these
Is difficult eneuch to tax the patience
O' Methuselah himsel' - but transformations,
Yont physical and mental habits, symbols, rites,
That mak' sic changes nane, are aye gaen on,
Revolutions in the dynasty o' live ideals
- The stuff wi' which alane true poetry deals.
Wagtail or water winna help me here,
(That's clearer than Wauchope at its clearest's clear!)
Where the life o' a million years is seen
Like a louch look in a lass's een. [216]

To really respond to contemporary life, MacDiarmid says, poetry must turn from "wagtail or water". He is not a poet whose work just incorporates sensitivity to change: he is a poet of that change itself.

MacDiarmid's life-work was to remove the marring "louch look" from the lass's eye, to make a society fit for people to "blossom" in. In "Happy on Heimaey" [217], a beautiful and witty reaction against the destructiveness of modern technology, he relaxed enough to show the depth and the permanence of his enjoyment of the natural world, but generally he rejected the straight use of nature in poetry as he came to reject lyricism. In spite of this, "On a Raised Beach" is a great religious, as well as a great philosophical poem. Intellectually it goes as far beyond its natural setting and imagery as anything in Wordsworth, but it remains rooted in a deeply sympathetic and scientific knowledge of nature. This is what I meant by suggesting that MacDiarmid's poetry operates within the field of tension between the two poles of materialist and metaphysical.

"Kandym" is a plant that fixes sand dunes; MacDiarmid chose it to represent the extension of consciousness a socialist poet might bring about in a dust-bowl society:

My songs are Kandym in the Waste Land. [218]

CHAPTER FIVE

NATURE AND RURAL POETRY FOR METAPHYSICAL ENQUIRY: THE LIMITS TO CELEBRATION AND ORTHODOXY

(i) Problems and potential of "the metaphysical" in nature and rural poetry

The "metaphysical" pole in modern British nature and rural poetry involves, as I said in my Introduction*, a culturally-mediated mythologising of sensory, creative interaction with the environment. Explanations may be fully understood, but supererogatory wonder and reverence persist as a fundamental part of this mode of "metaphysical enquiry". A more particular aspect of this metaphysical enquiry concerns the basic ontological sense of tracing the first principles of things and this operates in two ways - in an orthodox religious way (the Creation as manifestation of the Creator) and in a metaphorical way, where "God" becomes energy, life-force, the Aristotelian Prime Mover[1] or 'whatever's 'but there".[2] The first way is tied to organised religion and morality, which the second actively rejects, being concerned to continuously re-create its own metaphors of God. Neither of these ways is strictly philosophical, in the way that MacDiarmid's "On a Raised Beach" is often philosophical, as both choose to work almost exclusively through symbol, myth and image, but both are essentially exploratory. If, then, the first important aspect of metaphysical enquiry in nature and rural poetry is ontological, the second is the derivative notion of individual "being", the "essence" or irreducibility of things of Aristotle, the "haecceitas" of Hopkins, the "otherness" of Lawrence, the specificity of Ted Hughes.

Most poetry around this "metaphysical pole" is anti-rational, anti-scientific and sceptical of human significance and achievement: man is not the measure of all things and the mystical, the inexplicable and the unexplained are revalued accordingly. It is easy to see how reaction, defeatism, irrationality and mystification take root here: the possibility of social change can be denied with

* See above pp 17-18.

a dozen different myths. The answer is not, of course, to simply decide that the whole metaphysical category is superstitious and dangerous, nor is it true that spiritual and imaginative experience are mere functions of false consciousness. It is, rather, a question of recognising the general non-literality of poetic "truth" and then investigating, using devices such as "structure of feeling", the poetry's attitude and orientation towards the real, changing conditions of rural life and the significance of these in literary value judgements.

It is argued, of course, that religious sensibility (and here I am assuming considerable over-lap with the metaphysical) is by definition equivocal. Williams has commented on his own "tone-deafness" to religion in Culture and Society:

> I think I was unconsciously making the assumption, characteristic of a Marxist tradition which has been effectively criticised by Christopher Hill, that if religious terms occurred in a discourse[3] they were a transposition of social terms.

Williams went on to suggest another kind of transposition:

> A later phenomenon that I didn't emphasise enough was the crucial role that the idea of literary value played in[4] substituting for religious and ethical values ..

Before tracing the Marxist origins of the anti-religious and anti-metaphysical temperament, it is important to separate the institutional performance of religion, the Christian Church in this case, from its wider spiritual appeal. The dominant culture tends to transform all revolutionary and progressive tendencies and the Church has not escaped this process. Religion and the Church are no different, in this, to other ideological formations - in the Arts and Education, for instance. And yet, as with them, authentic reactions to experience are perfectly possible from within. In Anglican theology, a recent example of "authenticity" internally

differentiating itself from the institutional structure, is the collection of essays titled The Myth of God Incarnate. Its central controversial point is that much of what Christians hold to be divine truth, including the Incarnation itself, was in fact culturally determined and validated at particular times in history. Like Roman Catholic "Liberation Theology" in South America, The Myth of God Incarnate is a striking response to broadly Marxist thinking, though the book does, of course, redefine the place of Christian beliefs in the light of such thinking. Don Cupitt's contribution "The Christ of Christendom", brilliantly supported by iconographic evidence (the cultural "fossil record" of the Christian church) gives for the layman, perhaps, the clearest formulation of the book's main position. This passage is an example of the direction of its argument:

> What we have been taught to call 'orthodoxy' was in fact merely the form of Christianity which happened to triumph over the others. In retrospect, the Christ of the Eastern Church looks all too like the Hellenistic king, exalted to heaven to become the ideological basis of the Christian Empire; and the Christ of the Western Church looks like one who died to seal the authority of the patriarchal family as a model for the organisation of church and state. Neither Christ was Jesus, and neither reveals the one true God as Jesus did; and the political order with which conciliar orthodoxy was associated has now passed away for ever.[5]

As Ted Hughes sees Christianity as "just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the Creator and the world of spirit"[6], so does this group of Anglican scholars see the Incarnation, one of the traditionally unchanging articles of the Christian Faith, as "a mythological or poetic way of expressing his (Jesus') significance for us".[7] The reason for their stress on historical relativity is their desire to preserve values which might otherwise be discredited by association with indefensible positions. In this they are trying to avoid the kind of confrontation the Church experienced over Darwinism. Paralleling Ted Hughes, for whom the mysterious energies

of the Universe ("whatever is out there", which he is happy to call the Creator or God) are the sine qua non of poetry, is Don Cupitt, for whom Christology "must be theocentric, not christocentric",[8] i.e. the specifically religious values to which Christ bore witness must not be trapped in time:

> Precisely because they command us to die to the self, to the world which is passing away and so on, they assert the possibility of transcending relativity. As principles of transcendence they are the only non-relativistic criterion of the subsequent development of the tradition.
>
> In history, a man proclaimed the possibility of transcending history; and we, in history also, can verify his claim in practice. How can we depend upon the uncertainties of historical tradition for our knowledge of, and our power to attain, a history-transcending truth? Here the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of man coincide; for this is not just a problem, but the human condition itself.[9]

There is an obvious similarity here. If poetry and religion sometimes are different ways of understanding the same kinds of experience, we can see that the metaphysical enquiry of nature poetry and that of the theologians of The Myth of God Incarnate both assume that the movement or energy of the universe can be constantly re-encountered and re-interpreted in changing scientific and social circumstances. Both assume, too, that mythical expressions[10] are the shifting, temporal imagery of this underlying physical reality. It is opportune, at this point, to return to the anti-religious corrective of Marx:

> Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.[11]

And, of religion's irrelevant or escapist functioning, he wrote:

> The religious and theological consciousness has all the more religious and theological force in the complete democracy as it is without political significance and earthly aims. It is the affair of minds that are shy of the world, the expression of a limited understanding, the product of arbitrariness and fantasy, a really other-worldly life.[12]

In "Theses on Feuerbach" Marx commented that:

> Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations ... Feuerbach, consequently, does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual whom he analyses belongs to a particular form of society.[13]

This is a more intellectual statement of the revolutionary version expressed in Capital:

> The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case, only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellow-men and to Nature ...
>
> The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.[14]

It is plain from the last quotation that for Marx "the religious reflex" cannot wither until a very advanced historical moment: complex spiritual feeling, though "a mystical veil" is also a fact of contemporary life. Nevertheless, these quotations add up to a determinist or reflective view of religion not found in Marx's writings on aesthetics. I have been using the word "religious" in an admittedly literary sense, but the Marxist challenge is a powerful one that good "religious" and "metaphysical" poetry does not in fact ignore: this poetry is aware of its ideological framing and is formed by minds the opposite of world-shy. Fantasy solutions and invented realities are the very things it eschews. There is, however, one point of unresolved disagreement - Marx's Nineteenth Century scientific optimism about man's eventual "perfectly

intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellow-men and to Nature" is not something that Lawrence and Hughes could ever share. In fact, they blame such optimism for mankind's present alienation from nature, for the mind outgrowing the body and for consciousness dominating physical being. But in their most characteristic writing, they do not present material and metaphysical solutions to what they see as the disorientations and excesses of scientific materialism, for their analysis of contemporary sickness and disease involves only the traditional religious remedy wherein "the patient must minister to himself"[15].

In identifying modern misdirection and guilt, neither is entirely free from mystification, meaning here the use of religious terms to explain the results of economic conditions, but the conservative flavour of their alienation is not usually accompanied by dogmatism and hardly ever by class reaction - in the manner of the Georgians for example. They wish, instead, to address and "culture" the imagination and the psyche. It is helpful at this point, I believe, to consider parallel formulations in the thought of Carl Jung, whose diagnoses and ideas can be placed in the same anti-materialistic, anti-rationalist historical moment as that of Lawrence and Hughes. He too sees social and individual denial of the inner life as responsible for our collective and private "neuroses", our "social sickness"[16]. He talks of "the over-valuation of consciousness"[17] and of modern man's "almost fatal shock"[18] on recognising the failures of rationalism:

> He has seen how beneficient are science, technology and organisation, but also how catastrophic they can be. He has likewise seen that well-meaning governments have so thoroughly paved the way for peace on the principle "in time of peace prepare for war", that Europe has nearly gone to rack and ruin. And as for ideals, the Christian church, the brotherhood of man, international social democracy and the "solidarity" of economic interests have all failed to stand the baptism of fire - the test of reality.[19]

For Jung, too, orthodox religion can no longer satisfy man's spiritual needs:

> But as soon as he has outgrown whatever local form of religion he was born to - as soon as this religion can no longer embrace his life in all its fulness - then the psyche becomes something in its own right which cannot be dealt with by the measures of the Church alone.[20]

And:

> The various forms of religion no longer appear to the modern man to come from within - to be expressions of his own psychic life; for him they are to be classed with the things of the outer world. He is vouchsafed no revelation of a spirit that is not of this world; but he tries on a number of religions and convictions as if they were Sunday attire, only to lay them aside again like worn-out clothes.[21]

Jung's work in psychoanalysis recognises, in somewhat uncharacteristically ominous terms, the "dark stirrings of the unconscious"[22] and the need for a new science to interpret psychic life. His high evaluation of Art and Literature derives from his belief in their psychological foundations and relevance:

> ... even in our midst, the poet now and then catches sight of the figures that people the night-world - the spirits, demons and gods. He knows that a purposiveness out-reaching human ends is the life-giving secret for man; he has a presentiment of incomprehensible happenings in the pleroma. In short, he sees something of that psychic world that strikes terror into the savage and the barbarian.[23]

In Jung, the poet is a seer or leader who, like Hughes's shaman*, is able to over-come the "limitations of conscious outlook" in a particular epoch with its requirement for:

> ... a compensatory adjustment. This is effected by the collective unconscious in that a poet, a seer or a leader allows himself to be guided by the unexpressed desire of his times and shows the way, by word or deed, to the attainment of that which everyone blindly craves and expects - whether this attainment results in good or evil, the healing of an epoch or its destruction.[24]

* See below p 295 ff

Jung's romanticism is as apparent here as it is in his notion of "the modern man" as a solitary figure - "he alone is modern who is fully conscious of the present"[25]. But "romantic" will not adequately describe the theory of the societal origins of art, the production of a particular work of art by its context, that Jung puts forward in "Psychology and Literature" (Chapter VIII of Modern Man in Search of a Soul). Jung says:

> It is not Goethe who creates Faust, but Faust which creates Goethe. And what is Faust but a symbol? By this I do not mean an allegory that points to something all too familiar, but an expression that stands for something not clearly known and yet profoundly alive. Here it is something that lives in the soul of every German, and that Goethe has helped to bring to birth.[26]

Here the artist is a kind of mid-wife and in Jung generally the artist has an essentially "health-giving" function in that he becomes the medium for restorative imaginings or creative fantasies.

> He brings back the psychic equilibrium of the epoch as he draws "upon the healing and redeeming forces of the collective psyche that underlies consciousness with its isolation and its painful errors .. he has penetrated to that matrix of life in which all men are embedded, which imparts a common rhythm to all human existence ..."[27]

These quotations from Jung make up a rather more explicit, though still essentially metaphorical, statement of the views of Lawrence and Hughes. It is plainly a thin line that divides this Jungian, humanitarian function for art from a conveniently conservative kind of function that absorbs present differences and problems into comforting myths of solidarity. The critical task is to discriminate between ideological fantasy and imaginative exploration. Edwin Muir's early Twentieth Century poem "Horses" (1925) is interestingly caught between a conservative literariness derived from Tennyson and Wordsworth and a more modern archetypal way of feeling

that adopts a heightened child-like mode of perception in order to explore adult metaphysical questions:

> Perhaps some childish hour has come again,
> When I watched fearful, through the blackening rain,
> Their hooves like pistons in an ancient mill[28]
> Move up and down, yet standing still.

And the final, seventh verse:

> Ah, now it fades! it fades! and I must pine
> Again for that dread country crystalline
> Where the blank field and the still-standing tree
> Were bright and fearful presences to me.

In "Horses", the terrain of psychoanalysis and the (albeit expressionistic) pastoral of childhood[29] come together in a typically modern conjunction; the "redeeming forces of the collective psyche" and the search for the lost "common rhythm" of human existence are an intimate part of this conjunction and point directly to the Dylan Thomas of "Fern Hill".

(ii) Dylan Thomas: metaphysics and celebration

At one extreme, Muir's "dread country crystalline" with its supercharged memories of childhood, becomes in Thomas a cherished mythical region as firmly fixed and known as Dickens's Christmas. This is consistent with other popular aspects of Thomas's appeal (the bardic rhetoric of his voice and the romantic self-destructiveness of his life[30]) but the structure of feeling from which this writing emerges cannot be simply identified with escapism, nostalgia or class fantasy. Thomas writes a kind of pastoral in that the world and its relationships are held artificially constant, though for celebration and not for the examination of emotional complexity. Dickens and Thomas understand their convention well and generally do not fall victim to their own charm. Their celebration is not privatised: in Under Milk Wood, humour and tolerance participate in a celebration that includes no symbolic appropriation of property or

people. At the same time, economic questions and realities in Under Milk Wood are not blurred: they are part of the context held constant, but this should be seen as a dialectical technique. Fables and parables, in a similar way, finally return the reader to the surrounding context, for it would be as much missing the point not to return to that context as it would be to question it during the telling of the tale. The celebration of Dickens and Thomas, in other words, is a very moral thing, as Christian/humanist in its drive as the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In many ways Thomas is an isolated figure: no modern poet has so clear a genius and yet is so clearly open to criticism. He is enigmatic, too, as a "nature poet". He side-steps questions of social reality and he is not obviously part of the tradition of unorthodox metaphysical enquiry from Wordsworth. Thomas is eminently a religious poet[31] yet in disparate ways and with no particular leaning towards exploration. "Celebratory" is a convenient, though vulnerable word to describe Thomas's religious impulse. As Kershner says, it's not always clear what is being celebrated[32], though W S Merwin's general view of Thomas as celebrator is useful:

> ... the religious artist is primarily a celebrator. A celebrator in the ritual sense: a maker and performer of a rite. And also a celebrator in the sense of one who participates in the rite, and whom the rite makes joyful. That which he celebrates is creation, and more particularly the human condition.[33]

Thomas's famous note to the Collected Poems (1952), though incorporating a fittingly ambivalent attitude to "God", indicates the poet's own view of his work, with "love" and "praise" as the operative terms:

> ... I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: "I'd be a damn' fool if I didn't!" These poems, with all their crudities, doubts and confusions, are written for the love of Man and in praise of God, and I'd be a damn' fool if they weren't.[34]

Stuart Holroyd's conflation of this love and praise into a basically unmetaphysical "Religion of the Instinctive Life" ("Whereas the pantheist normally sees God in all things, Thomas saw sex in all things"[35]) may seem extreme, but this physical "celebration" in early Thomas is the central motif. Discussing "The Force that through the green fuse drives the flower/Drives my green age ..."[36]

G S Fraser wrote:

> This equation of the human and the natural and the celebration of both as divine, are Thomas's central themes and they enable him to confer on the adolescent sexual turbulence out of which most of his earlier poems grew, a surprising impersonal dignity (in his later poems he was often more concerned to recapture a childish, non-sexual vision of nature as the Garden of Eden).[37]

Certainly, in poems like "Fern Hill" and "Poem in October", Eden imagery is prominent but as part of a complex of feelings moving towards age and death, rather than as a rejection of sex and the confusion of sex. Celebration is still the key-note and the poems operate within its protection. The mythologised personal response to nature is foregrounded - in fact Thomas makes this into a whole mode of perception and a style. His need to "express and affirm himself in the objective world"* becomes a religious rite and a sacred celebration: his poetic versions of his creative sensory responses to nature, make him a true metaphysical poet of nature, but because his work is primarily endorsement not enquiry, it must play a very marginal part in my argument. Thomas mastered celebratory poetry, but he never left the bounds of himself, never attempted any negotiation between his own historical and cultural moment and the enduring rhythms of human existence. This may account for the common ambivalence of attitude in Thomas's critics and the

* See above p 18.

frequent allegations of immaturity: at the same time as one is struck by his greatness, one is also struck by his inability to reach out beyond immediate experience. Thomas's last work, in fact, is grounded even more persistently in the self: if it is true that he chose to reduce his experience of nature to several "versions of pastoral", instead of following it into regions and questions beyond himself, it is also true that the result is magnificent, celebratory poetry.

(iii) Nature poetry and religious orthodoxy: Gerard Manley Hopkins

Metaphysical enquiry in the Wordsworthian tradition has an imaginative freedom denied to orthodox religious poetry, which must stop short of Hughes's Crow, who can walk "letting the translucent starry spaces/Blow in his ear cluelessly".[38] Crow's self-abandonment and indestructibility (the sun could not burn "Limpid and black -/Crow's eye-pupil in the tower of its scorched fort"[39]) represents a free-ranging, irreverent mode of exploration unavailable to Twentieth Century Christian poetry. Nevertheless there is good nature and rural poetry working within an orthodox Christian system of thought and Gerard Manley Hopkins (considered as a "modern" writer) is obviously the main point of reference for such poetry and its accompanying difficulties.

Stylistically, Hopkins anticipates contemporary nature poetry's concern to detail the movement and character of its subject matter. The compressed energy of "mealed-with-yellow sallows"[40] or "time's vast, womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night"[41], has come through Dylan Thomas into contemporary nature poetry, but more interestingly (in view of Lawrence and Hughes) Hopkins emphasised his own subjective centrality:

> ... my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the smell of walnut leaf or camphor and is incommunicable by any means to another man (as when I was a child I used to ask myself: What must it be to be someone else?). Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own.[42]

In "As Kingfishers catch fire" he wrote that each mortal thing:

> Selves-goes itself; myself it speaks and spells[43]
> Crying What I do is me: for that I came

This notion of "selving", of the unique pattern or "inscape" that makes a thing distinctively itself, was theologically justified for Hopkins in Duns Scotus' doctrine that haecceitas (thisness) is the "final perfection" of any creature.[44] At one level it gives Hopkins's nature poetry vitality and freshness and at another, a profound philosophical engagement. Ultimately, however, these levels are contradictory, for Hopkins basically follows St Ignatius: "Man was created to praise, reverence and serve God Our Lord". Man is "Earth's eye"[45] while the Creation itself in all its variety and individuality, essentially proclaims the Glory of God. Within a Christian framework this is perfectly acceptable, but it does mean that finally all perspectives and all differences are predictable and determined. The line to Lawrence and Hughes is thus terminated, as for them a creature's end lies finally and mysteriously within itself. In this basic disagreement we can see modern nature poetry's bid for religious territory. However much Hopkins works to particularise and differentiate, his own underlying religious assumptions under-cut the independence of the enquiry:

> All things counter, original, spare, strange;
> Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
> With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
> He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
> Praise him.[46]

A sense of these restrictions may have led Austin Warren to claim that Hopkins's "thinking about beauty, man and Nature is unimpressive".[47] For Thomas Blackburn, Hopkins's excessive nervous sensitivity safeguarded the poet's perceptions of Nature:

> But hyperaesthesia was his faithful wife
> And selved him into novel ways of seeing,
> He pruned stale nature with a verbal knife
> To expose the scape and stress of green leaves growing.[48]

Yet most of Blackburn's poem (he does have it both ways!) deals with just that denial of imaginative freedom, that "clinching moral", that critically limits Hopkins's influence on the metaphysical direction taken by nature poetry in the Twentieth Century:

> But he wrenched his vision of things as they are
> To piebald images of Jesus Christ
> And so did violence to metaphor.
> For the Windhover, Oxford, Inversnaid
> Could never be illustrations of dogma
> Only themselves: It seems he was afraid
> Of letting creatures be just as they are.

For Lawrence and Hughes, modern man has to re-define his animal relationship to Nature. The poet explores and his conclusions are not pre-determined. Like Beckett's Malone, there is only one's "present state"[49] to work from. Malone can hear people moving about and he knows he is in a room of some kind, but there certainties end:

> But all things considered I would be hard
> set to say for certain where exactly they
> are, in relation to where exactly I am ....
> There is naturally another possibility that does
> not escape me, though it would be a great
> disappointment to have it confirmed, and that is
> that I am dead already ...[50]

For Hopkins, modern man's estrangement from Nature is an image of the loss of Eden, which itself mythically illustrates man's estrangement from God. In "The Sea and the Skylark", he marvels

> How these two shame this shallow and frail town!
> How ring right out our sordid turbid time,
> Being pure! We, life's pride and cared-for crown,
>
> Have lost that cheer and charm of earth's past prime:
> Our make and making break, are breaking, down
> To man's last dust, drain fast towards man's first slime[51].

Creation becomes a weight on the poet. It must always illustrate, always tend towards Christ:

> As we drove home the stars came out thick:
> I leant back to look at them and my
> heart opening more than usual praised
> our Lord to and in whom all that beauty
> comes home.[52]

As Nature must function for Hopkins in this way, so must his own nature, despoiled like any industrial landscape, be forcibly restored to the service of God. Donald McChesney, discussing Hopkins's"destructive ruthlessness with himself" has said:

> Perhaps because of his ingrained English puritanism
> he forgot, most of the time, the dictum of St Thomas
> Aquinas that grace is built upon nature, not upon
> the abolition of nature.[53]

This tendency towards harsh, solitary religious experience finally sets up abstraction against concrete physical life. "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire" can resolve this contradiction (worthlessness v. abundance and richness) only because it is a poem about death. Man, Nature's "bonniest, dearest to her, her clearest-selved spark", is resurrected out of Nature:

> Flesh fade, and mortal trash
> Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire, leave
> but ash:
> In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
> I am all at once what Christ is, since he was
> what I am, and
> This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
> Is immortal diamond.[54]

The problem of "Nature-denying" puritanism in Christian nature poetry is thus solved when the subject is death and decay, for puritanism and death make the same reductions.

Reduction of one's own nature is one thing, but when, inevitably, it is extended to mankind and used in the analysis of social phenomena, we shall be left with reactionary generalisations instead of the inscape of individual lives. Hopkins's thinking, in "Tom's Garland"[55], for example, returns to the traditional argument of Menenius in the "belly" speech of Coriolanus or Henry V's "Upon the King" speech in Act IV of Henry V. In a letter to Robert Bridges (February 10 1888), he explained:

> It means then that, as St Paul and Plato and Hobbes and everybody says, the commonwealth or well ordered human society is like one man; a body with many members and each its function; some higher, some lower, but all honourable, from the honour which belongs to the whole ... The foot is the day-labourer .... But this place still shares the common honour, and if it wants one advantage, glory or public fame, makes up for it by another, ease of mind, absence of care ... The witnessing of which lightheartedness makes me indignant with the fools of Radical Levellers.

He goes on to regret:

> that the curse of our times is that many do not share it (the Common weal) that they are outcasts from it and have neither security nor splendour; that they share care with the high and obscurity with the low, but wealth or comfort with neither. And this state of things, I say, is the origin of Loafers, Tramps, Cornerboys, Roughs, Socialists and other pests of society.[56]

The argument of equal honour is, in itself, as unexceptionable as the notion of human equality in Christ, but the constant abuse of these arguments, by those who have done very well out of their misinterpretation, puts a special responsibility on a poet to redefine the contemporary condition of men. In "Tom's Garland" and "Harry Ploughman", however, Hopkins sentimentally falls back on the stereotypes of "Tom Navvy", "Tom seldom sick" and "Sturdy Dick"[57] and sub-Biblical, bookish images of a working-man ("as a beechbole firm" with his "barrelled shank" and "liquid waist", etc).[58] From

his vantage-point the poet indulges his technical appreciation of "form" ("He leans to it, Harry bends, look") though unlike "Felix Randal" the poem "Harry Ploughman" has no professional ministerial duty to justify its patronising intrusiveness. Individual rhythms are denied here, just as Hopkins denies the rhythm of "Poor Jackself" - "My own heart let me more have pity on"[59].

These denials are more profoundly, if more controversially, linked to the "counter, original, spare, strange" texture of Hopkins's language. Often this language has great imaginative density, but it also, frequently, acts as a display of muscularity subduing the deeper rhythms of the material. One is led back to those earlier objections to Hopkins's nature poetry. Hopkins certainly seeks natural rhythms, advising us that his verse is:

> as living art should be, made for performance and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables and so on. This sonnet ("Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves") shd be almost sung: it is most carefully timed in tempo rubato.[60]

He also knows the difficulty his verse presents:

> Indeed, when, on somebody returning to me my Eurydice, I opened and read some lines, reading, as one commonly reads whether prose or verse, with the eyes, so to say, only, it struck me aghast with a kind of raw nakedness and unmitigated violence I was unprepared for; but take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wish to be read,[61] and my verse becomes right.

These are compelling arguments. Harold Whitehall, quoting them in his essay "Sprung Rhythm", goes on to link Hopkins's poetry to alliterative verse[62], but there is a determined mentalism in Hopkins's language that cannot, I would suggest, finally be accommodated by the voice. Perhaps the isolated conditions under which he worked - his lack of contact with an audience or reading public - facilitated the separation of his poetry from a speaking voice. In New Bearings in English Poetry, Leavis, taking up Bridges'

phrase "continuous literary decorum", makes the case for setting Hopkins "with Shakespeare, Donne, Eliot and the later Yeats as opposed to Spenser, Milton and Tennyson".[65] Certainly, Eliot's and laterLeavis's restoration of an active, critical/verbal dimension to the reading of poetry was a momentous achievement very relevant to the appreciation of Hopkins, but Leavis's identification of the Shakespearian mode in Hopkins is pushed beyond its allowable significance, in that Leavis makes much of the "read it with the ears" argument while actually concentrating on the (perfectly appropriate) similarity between Hopkins's "imagery and his way of using the body and movement of the language"[64] and Shakespeare's. Shakespeare, even in (or especially in) "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined", one of Leavis's examples, never loses touch with his speech base, his performability, whereas Hopkins is always subject to this danger:

> Soul, self; come, poor Jackself, I do advise
> You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile
> Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size
>
> At God knows when to God knows what; whose smile
> 's not wrung, see you; unforseen times rather -as skies
> Betweenpie mountains - lights a lovely mile.[65]

I am certainly not returning to the defence of "continuous literary decorum" but I am claiming that Hopkins's limitations as a nature poet, and as an analyst of changing social relations, spring from the same source as the limitations in the "speaking voice" of his poetry. These could be summarised as an over-cerebral controlling of rhythm and the processes of poetic exploration. Put more positively, poems such as "No worst, there is none"[66] and "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day"[67], overcome these limitations, discovering rhythms appropriate to the delicacy and fineness of their exploration of spiritual desolation. The language

is just as "difficult": in Brechtian terms it still alienates, still draws critical attention to the issues, but now there is dramatic structure and a speaking voice providing rhythmic continuity.[68]

It is in poems such as these that Hopkins's real importance lies, for if it is argued that nature poetry is best unmapped and not predetermined, then Hopkins's nature poetry, whatever fleeting autonomy his imagination may establish, remains an undeveloped body of work. He should be seen, rather, as a great "devotional poet of a dogmatic Christianity".[69] Devotional poetry <u>is</u> illustrative and <u>does</u> work to uncover a given framework. As in George Herbert's devotional analogies, Hopkins's illustrations are bold and direct, but this actually increases their acceptability. They do not purport to be exploring the individual life of a thing while really enlisting that life for their own ends. The emblematic use of Nature is now fully conscious and fully separated from the poetic discovery of inscape:

> As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage
> Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells -
> That bird beyond the remembering his free fells,
> This in drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age. [70]

At the opposite pole to this, Hopkins can fully integrate natural imagery with his religious intentions. There is no "clinching moral" in his "O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed"[71] or his Blakean, lionlimbed Despair scanning "with darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones".[72] There is a freedom of association here, just as there is, for example, in the unambitious descriptive poem "Inversnaid", which echoes Tennyson's "The Brook". The last verse of "Inversnaid" indicates the deep attraction towards Nature that Hopkins felt:

> What would the world be, once bereft
> Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
> O let them be left, wildness and wet;
> Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.[73]

Hopkins's response to Nature is much more remarkably developed in "Binsey Poplars": in my Introduction (p.2) I quoted this as an "environmental" poem that produces a profound image of destructiveness. But Hopkins was too devout a Christian to allow his response to nature to continue to open up in this way. If nature poetry provides a mode of re-stating humanity's sense of place within the universe, then Hopkins finally chose to use this mode within the imaginative constraints of established religion. A similar dilemma about the use of nature poetry for metaphysical enquiry appears half a century later in the work of R S Thomas.

(iv) Nature poetry and religious orthodoxy: R S Thomas

Hopkins and R S Thomas share many characteristics, from a degree of social reductionism and puritanism, to the use of nature for devotional and emblematic purposes: they are particularly interesting in their attempts to retain autonomy for nature and for poetry, within a formal religious scheme. For Hopkins, the fundamental purpose of life is the praise of God, with the result that the exploratory function of poetry (so important in his version of nature poetry) may come to appear somewhat artificial. R S Thomas's stated position on this is unequivocal:

> ... to me any form of orthodoxy is just not part of a poet's province at all. A poet must be able to claim a certain amount of poetic licence, freedom to follow the vision of poetry, the imaginative vision of poetry ... in any case, poetry is religion, religion is poetry. The message of the New Testament is poetry. Christ was a poet, the New Testament is a metaphor, the Resurrection is a metaphor; and I feel perfectly within my rights in approaching my whole vocation as priest and as preacher as one who is to present poetry; and when I preach poetry I am preaching Christianity, and when one discusses Christianity one is discussing poetry in its imaginative aspects. The core of both are imagination ...
> My work as a poet has to deal with the presentation of imaginative truth ... Of course I'm using the word imagination in its Coleridgean sense, which is the highest means known to the human psyche of getting into contact with the ultimate reality;[74]

This passage alludes to many matters of importance for this thesis: R S Thomas's Romantic understanding of the truths of the Imagination modulates into Hardyesque ideas that "poetry is religion, religion is poetry", while he defends the inevitable unorthodoxy of poetry. His understanding of Christianity, "the Resurrection is a metaphor", sounds as radical as The Myth of God Incarnate essays. In all this, Thomas is close to the unorthodox line of metaphysical enquiry from Wordsworth to Lawrence and Hughes: one has to remind oneself that these are the views of an Anglican priest. The poetry, in fact, dramatises the deep spiritual conflicts of Thomas's imagination at the same time as its use of nature poetry for metaphysical enquiry stretches religious orthodoxy to the limit.

R S Thomas is not concerned with "selving" and individual fruition. Everything in the world is taken to be impure, but through the imagination these impurities may be made to reveal permanent truths. Even the overtones of liturgical language speak of that reality ("Overtones, those signals from an ever present reality"[75]), while Thomas's familiar anti-pastorals may be seen as temptations to deny the underlying religious reality. In "The Labourer", having sought to bear faithful poetic witness to the region his poetry leads him into (where the labourer is more of a tree than a man), Thomas affirms the metaphysical values of Christianity:

> Bend down and peer beneath the twigs of hair,
> And look into the hard eyes, flecked with care;
> What do you see? Notice the twitching hands,
> Veined like a leaf, and tough bark of the limbs,
> Wrinkled and gnarled, and tell me what you think.
> A wild tree still, whose seasons are not yours,
> The slow heart beating to the hidden pulse
> Of the strong sap, the feet firm in the soil?
> No, no, a man like you, but blind with tears
> Of sweat to the bright star that draws you on.[76]

Enormous assumptions are made here about the reader, but what is not in doubt is Thomas's determination, like Ted Hughes, "to follow the

vision of poetry". Time and again in reading R S Thomas's poems of the 1940's and early 1950's, Ted Hughes's world is anticipated. Phrases like "the moor's/Pitiless commentary and the wind's veto" and notions like burying a "still-born" cry or the moor as an active personality (in "The Minister"), have the same harsh vigour, stemming (as in Hughes) from full recognition of the realities of life and nature.

If the nature poetry of Lawrence and Hughes is successful as metaphysical enquiry because of its lack of any religious orthodoxy, in R S Thomas we have a Christian poet claiming that he can discover metaphysical reality through nature.[77] Though he believes in a hidden, unchanging reality, R S Thomas is determined to approach this reality entirely through contemporary experience. This means, among other things, acknowledging the near-hopeless conditions of farming in the Welsh hills and the comfortless isolation of the rural Anglican priest today - in an alien, non-conformist culture to boot. In exploring the poetic difficulties and successes encountered by R S Thomas, as he attempts to understand God through the social and natural reality around him, it would be easy to argue that he has actually abandoned his Christianity. It would be more accurate to see him as a kind of Job (to whom he specifically compares himself in "Priest and Peasant"[78], while the title Stones of the Field (1946) is from Job 5.23), whose most optimistic moments are either pantheistic (e.g. "The Moor"[79]) or stoical ("The meaning is in the waiting"[80]), but who will not deny God even though H'm (1972) certainly takes us near to a radical re-statement of divine morality. There is a sense of impasse in H'm - a feeling that the poet who had anticipated so much of Ted Hughes, is now actually being influenced by the mood and methods of Crow (1970). For Thomas cannot follow the vision wherever it may go: he is a priest-poet like

Hughes, but he is accountable to his own Christian faith and in this his basic impulse is towards devotion.

The structure of feeling associated with Thomas's devotional poetry involves at least two major weaknesses - one is a tendency to a rather portentous Yeatsian/Biblical language ("I will cease now/ My long absorption with the plough", "One night of tempest I arose" etc) and the other (as in the excerpt from "The Labourer" above) is the unthinking adoption of a class stand-point. This really means that the poet's duty of faithfulness to experience has tricked him into setting up a particular kind of social experience as normative. Though Thomas's chronicling of his spiritual journey must involve the social role of the priest, it does become another kind of Georgianism, or anti-Georgianism, when the poet mistakes his own lack of self-awareness for vigorous honesty. Probing his disgust, which is sanctioned by Christian dualism, Thomas entirely omits live analysis of his own social role. I would argue that the dramatic method of "The Minister" has internal correctives to this failing, though Thomas's later work unfortunately settles for the very different style of first-person apologia and, in his case, its accompanying limitations. I shall try to support these assertions about R S Thomas's poetry through a consideration of Song at the Year's Turning (1955), the book which collected Thomas's early publications (less twenty-three poems) into one volume. Following this, I shall consider Thomas's subsequent development in terms of his attempt to record, often through nature poetry, his own metaphysical explorations - the titles of two of his recent books, Laboratories of the Spirit (1975) and Frequencies (1978) with their over-tones of scientific method and radio communication, speak of his feeling that he, like Hughes, is at today's metaphysical frontier.

[81] [82]

John Betjeman, in his "Introduction" to Song at the Year's Turning, strikes the right tone in describing R S Thomas's role as a country priest:

> He went with a keen interest in
> natural history and birds, in scenery,
> agriculture and the agricultural way
> of life. By talking to his parishioners
> in their own language about the things
> they knew, he would win the souls
> to the Christian faith and the sacraments.[83]

Betjeman seems to anticipate the inevitable sense of let-down. Traditional Christian texts ("a prophet is not without honour save in his own country", "he came unto his own and his own received him not", etc[84]) stand behind this rejection and failure of trust, but in R S Thomas's case one is very conscious of cultural discrepancies. The Bardic invective of "A Priest to this People", those people "who have not yet shaken the moss from your savage skulls,/or prayed the peat from your eyes"[85], is based as much on behaviour and art as religion:

> How I have hated you for your irreverence, your scorn even
> Of the refinements of art and the mysteries of the Church.[86]

The "savage skulls" in this poem, or the narrator's description, in "The Minister", of a chapel as "religion's outpost/In the untamed land west of the valleys"[87], are consistent with an imperialist outlook, which, though superficially separated from economics and legitimised by Christian respect for the immortal human soul, belongs to a rigid and restrictive structure of feeling. This objection is not based on assumptions that R S Thomas's personae really speak directly for the man and that Thomas stands condemned by his own reactionary attitudes. It is clear, however, that Thomas can really only feel as an alien in the Arnold/Leavis tradition. He imports a set of culturally specific attitudes which he takes to be eternally true, and is then unable to use them to penetrate the new situation.

Contemporary work on youth sub-cultures, to take a parallel case, demonstrates the discrepancy between the alarmed ignorance of the dominant culture and its media and the ordered reality of life within those sub-cultures[88]. The dominant culture tells us only of its own fears. A poetic structure of feeling unwittingly locked into a class view-point cannot, for similar reasons, offer a rewarding response to unfamiliar experience. At best, that experience will be presented as "a crude tapestry"[89] except for those occasions when the poet risks his own values on equal terms - as in "The Minister".

Typically, as he points out the native way of life, Thomas encourages the reader to accept common ground with his poet/guide. The view-point is privileged: extreme "straight-talking" is permissible because of the writer's priest/anthropologist role and his commitment to the soul within. Yet only by an act of faith does he keep alive his sense of peasant humanity:

> Consider this man in the field beneath,
> Gaitered with mud, lost in his own breath,
> Without joy, without sorrow,
> Without children, without wife,
> Stumbling insensitively from furrow to furrow,
> A vague somnambulist; but hold your tears,
> For his name also is written in the Book of Life.[90]

As if we doubted it, Thomas warns us against the error he actually experiences himself:

> Don't be taken in
> By stinking garments or an aimless grin;
> He also is human ...[91]

Invitations to examine specimens of this questionable humanity are widespread in Song, though underlying them all is the dogma of infinite, personal value ("Listen, listen, I am a man like you"[92]). In "Out of the Hills", he gives a typically isolated reply to his own question about the farmer going down to the town ("Shall we follow him down, witness his swift undoing/In the indifferent streets..")

with the answer "No, wait for him here ... The earth is patient; he is not lost".[93]

Thomas is requesting our loyalty to a set of generalisations and assumptions that stand between us and the human complexity of his material. We are expected to concur with the picture of degradation he draws as he looks steadily into the desperate human reality. In "Summer" the farmer's "blood uncurls with the slow sap" and "grows hot"[94], while in "Soil" "the hedge defines/The mind's limits" of the labourer whose "blood seeps home/To the warm soil from which it came"[95] when he cuts himself while topping swedes. The final poem in Song to be omitted from Selected Poems, talks of the cold, grey ash and the dark and bare interior of "The Last of the Peasantry":

> What does he know? Moving through the fields
> And the wood's echoing cloisters
> With a beast's gait, hunger in his eyes
> Only for what the flat earth supplies;
> His wisdom dwindled to a small gift
> For handling stock, planting a few seeds
> To ripen slowly in the warm breath
> Of an old God to whom he never prays.[96]

The evocation of unregenerate animality[97] and Dark Ages ignorance (note the weight of "the flat earth") in today's fall from grace, insists on cultural and class norms that limit the poem's interest. The scornful question about knowledge and the assertion about wisdom are not balanced by any other resources within the poem and there is no sense of self-awareness in the tone of voice. It is as though Swift were to drop his artful manipulation of the reader and, asking one final, blunt question about humanity, exchange the process of literature for our simple support or rejection of his views.

The Eden myth in "The Last of the Peasantry" is typical of Thomas's anti-pastoral and complements such other myths as those of natural grace (e.g. "Farm Child"[98]) and youthful innocence (e.g. "Lament for Prytherch"[99]) and men as unified with their environment (e.g. "The Poacher"[100]). Against this background (much of it tinged with loss), Thomas articulates on behalf of a diminished and deprived

people: he sees himself as their sense organs and their intellectual and spiritual interpreter. "Enigma" begins, "A man is in the fields, let us look with his eyes"[101] and in "Memories" he offers, on Iago's behalf whose "lips are sealed/By a natural reticence", to "sing/the land's praises, making articulate/Your strong feelings, your thoughts of no date".[102] This is a very familiar modern social attitude, full of paternalistic good will but ultimately incapable of allowing self-realisation because it insists on a relationship of dependency: the "means of production" stay out of communal control.

In "Cynddylan on a Tractor", "The Hill Farmer Speaks" and "Ire"[103], Thomas attempts varying degrees of dramatisation and the awkwardness and dullness are somewhat mitigated, but for a structure of feeling more adequate to the subject-matter one must turn to a poem like "The Airy Tomb".[104] In the opening lines one immediately senses a greater acceptance of difference and variety and this is reflected in the tone and "personality" of the narrator. He may have his own views, but this does not cut the material down to size:

> Twm was a dunce at school, and was whipped and shaken
> More than I care to say, but without avail,
> For where one man can lead a horse to the pail
> Twenty can't make him drink what is not to his mind ...[104]

Even the bitterness and alienation of Thomas's characteristic voice ("And what is love to an uncultured youth/In the desolate pastures, but the itch of cattle/At set times and seasons?")[105] is accommodated by the poem's larger framework. It is only towards the end that Thomas's confidence and interest seem to flag as the narrator's voice begins to turn on the "hypocrite reader, at ease in your chair ..."[106] The tone and scope of Wordsworth's "Michael" and Frost's "The Hired Man" are finally not sustained but the poem has notable successes: consider, for example, the two dozen lines of the third verse paragraph ("So his shadow ..." to "land he trod"[107]). The Wordsworth-Frost line is clear but Thomas develops it very distinctively with his priest's

understanding of mortality and his sure feeling for the harsh conditions of life on "the lean patch of land,/Pinned to the hill-top, and the cloudy acres ..."[108]

Of these early poems, "The Minister" provides the main evidence for this line of argument on R S Thomas's "structure of feeling" for in this radio play broadcast in 1952, Thomas consciously sets out to explore,objectivise and dramatise the problematic roles of priest, poet and parishioner.

At one level "The Minister" records the education of a minister as he comes to understand the trap of parish life. It deals almost cruelly with his little vanities - his licensed space ("I was good that night, I had the hwyl"[109] and "It was my biggest funeral of all"[110]). The minister learns that he cannot actually break into the people's way of life and in his final lines in the play he seems compromised and powerless. Real religious issues have not been touched, a failure that is pictured in "the blood of God" wasting as though from a wound:

> Although I never pried, I knew it all.
> I knew why Buddug was away from chapel.
> I knew that Pritchard, the Fron, watered his milk.
> I knew who put the ferret with the fowls
> In Pugh's hen-house. I knew and pretended I didn't.
> They listened to me preaching the unique gospel
> of love; but our eyes never met. And outside
> The blood of God darkened the evening sky.[111]

The portrait is bitterly humorous. The minister's first words are:

> The Reverend Elias Morgan, B.A.:
> I am the name on whom the choice fell[112]

In his black coat, "fresh from college", Morgan "was the lamp which the elders chose/To thaw the darkness that had congealed/About the hearts of the hill folk".[113] The ironies are heaped up (Morgan's Calvinistic preaching actually stimulates lechery!), but there are warmer moments - the pathos of the Sunday School episode and the day when a child makes Morgan a gift of an egg. In the section where he

returns from his holidays, the poetry achieves a synthesis of these extremes of tenderness and irony:

> When I returned, strengthened, to the bare manse
> That smelled of mould, someone had broken a window
> During my absence and let a bird in.
> I found it dead, starved, on the warm sill.
> There is always the thin pane of glass set up between us
> And our desires.
> We stare and stare and stare, until the night comes
> And the glass is superfluous.
> I went to my cold bed saddened, but the wind
> in the tree
> Outside soothed me with echoes of the sea.[114]

Within the poem, Morgan must compete on equal terms with Job Davies, "a master/Hand at choosing a nag or a pastor".[115] For all the crudity and the loaded "logic of the Smithfield"[116] in this portrayal, Davies is given a kind of life and energy. The structure of the verse drama allows him space. He persists, as the social reality of which he is a part persists.

Thomas's interest in social complexity in "The Minister" is, no doubt, undeveloped, for the whole piece is very top-heavy with the narrator having well over half the lines in the play. But though the narrator's role often dramatises the "poet's opinion" (displayed, I have argued, so damagingly elsewhere in Song) there is a strong feeling that Thomas is trying to fit the narrator's part into that complexity. In the narrator's first speech, for instance, Thomas achieves a neutral, folk perspective on life in the hill country ("This is the land where they burn peat/If there is time for cutting it ..."[117]) and much of the narrator's subsequent commentary occurs within this perspective. Finally, it is true, the narrator does define the play's structural weakness, as dramatisation gives way to summary and moral:

> Need we go on? In spite of all
> His courage Morgan could not avert
> His failure, for he chose to fight
> With that which yields to nothing human.[118]

As the narrative crumbles, however, the metaphysical importance of "The Minister" becomes apparent, for the poem's conclusion is that Calvinism is doomed to failure before the primary truths of nature:

> We will listen instead to the wind's text
> Blown through the roof, or the thrush's song
> In the thick bush that proved him wrong,
> Wrong from the start, for nature's truth
> Is primary and her changing seasons
> Correct out of a vaster reason,
> The vague errors of the flesh.[119]

So the poem returns to its initial attempt to explore without imposing orthodox limits. At the start, the philosophical position was similar to that of Hughes:

> 'Beloved, let us love one another', the words are blown
> To pieces by the unchristened wind
> In the chapel rafters, and love's text
> Is riddled by the inhuman cry
> Of buzzards circling above the moor.[120]

Later, again recalling Hughes, Protestantism is described as "the adroit castrator/Of art; the bitter negation/Of song and dance and the heart's innocent joy -"[121] In the course of "The Minister", Thomas tries to bear witness to reality and to follow his poetic vision, without the controls of orthodoxy. Morgan can never achieve harmony, it is suggested, because he will not listen to the moor or the thrush. His knowledge,

> Would have been complete, had it included
> The bare moor, where nature brooded
> Over her old, inscrutable secret.[122]

Morgan, it is said at the end, "never listened to the hill's/Music calling to the hushed/Music within; but let his mind/Fester with brooding on the sly/Infirmities of the hill people".[123] This, in the spirit and partly in the tones of Wordsworth, is both a human and a mystical response to nature. In "The Minister", Thomas comes near to the Lawrence/Hughes tradition of using nature for metaphysical enquiry, although God remains an unchanging, inscrutable and trusted "given" exempt from the grim implications of the enquiry.

In this way, the enquiry turns back onto the human and physical, producing a negative analysis relying on such doctrines as original sin, "the strange disease of modern life" and the inability of men to perceive religious reality. "The Minister" admits "primary truths" Morgan himself will not accept and its structure of feeling and level of dramatisation are correspondingly and suitably complex, but the poem does not follow those truths back towards its idea of God.

This unresolved contradiction runs through the poetry of the next ten years - Poetry for Supper (1958), Tares (1961), The Bread of Truth (1963), Pieta (1966) and Not That He Brought Flowers (1968) though there is a sense of truce in these volumes, which permits a brief celebration of the human qualities Thomas admires. The objective structure and style of "The Minister", however, is not repeated and only a very few poems, "Gospel Truth" (Pieta) and "On the Farm" (Not That He Brought Flowers) are the clearest examples, attempt to formally check that reductive structure of feeling associated with the bourgeois priest's apologia. Sometimes, as in "The Muck Farmer" (Poetry for Supper), Thomas simply repeats the alienated vituperation of Song at the Year's Turning, but in Poetry for Supper particularly, and the subsequent volumes generally, his view of humanity has softened - unless that humanity is an English week-ender, for whom Thomas has reserved his most bitter contempt.[124]

In "Portrait" and "Which?", both from Tares, he approaches the familiar Iago Prytherch with a new respect, while in "Servant" (The Bread of Truth) with its opening line "You served me well, Prytherch"[125] he revalues him altogether, acknowledging that through Prytherch he has actually obtained "the bread of truth". "Absolution" (Poetry for Supper) admits Prytherch was right the whole time and asks for his forgiveness. In the first two verses of "Iago Prytherch" (Poetry for Supper), too, Thomas confesses and explains his earlier attitudes,

but the poem's final verse describes the change more eloquently:

> I passed and saw you
> Labouring there, your dark figure
> Marring the simple geometry
> Of the square fields with its gaunt question.
> My poems were made in its long shadow
> Falling coldly across the page. 126

There is imaginative trust here. The poet distances himself from the image, as he does in "Evans" (Poetry for Supper) and "The Figure" (The Bread of Truth) and so leaves room for the human figure to establish itself. Elsewhere, especially in Tares, Thomas exchanges named personalities for generalised examples of humanity - the labourer in "Hireling" and the old people in "The Survivor", "Ninetieth Birthday" and "An Old Man". Admiration tips over into Manley Hopkins' romanticisation in "A Gardener" (Poetry for Supper) and "Lore" (Tares) while "Too Late", also in Tares, regrets the servility that accompanies economic improvement:

> I would have seen you poor and in rags 127
> Rather than wealthy and not free.

In this poem, Prytherch's old content with his "accustomed ration/Of bread and bacon" is very like the Tom of Hopkins's "Tom's Garland".

In place of the more tortured earlier poetry we have, in such work, an easy-going reliance on conventional attitudes. There are many poems where the struggle with language is similarily abandoned. The short lyric "Song" (The Bread of Truth), for example, speaking "the language/Of sweetness and light", scrambles a series of cliché together:

> Take my hand
> That has grown wise
> In truth's service,
> Crippled with stone
> That asked bread. 128

Thomas does not always take these easier paths in language and the development of subject matter: "Encounter" (The Bread of Truth)

engages with the problem of the priest's role and function and with the paradox of timelessness within change. The second verse presents these as tensions:

> He saw me then, my tall shadow
> Fell with the old ambivalence
> Of the priest over his slow path
> Skyward, and our glances met
> Over the mows, the weeds, the years
> With brute glumness, while history passed
> Noisily by us on steel wings.[129]

Once again the Imagist manner liberates Thomas's poetry and indicates the great strength of which it is capable.

In his approach to Nature, too, Thomas seems to be going through a softer, less critical and frequently feebler period. In "The View from the Window" (Poetry for Supper) we are almost in Patience Strong's world:

> All through history
> The great brush has not rested ...[130]

This off-key religious aestheticism is at its most mundane in Tares (e.g. "The Maker", "The Conductor", "The Musician") and debilitated lyricism (e.g. "A Day in Autumn" or "Fable" in Poetry for Supper) is also not uncommon.

Stillness, resignation and patience, the dominant notes of Pieta, lead, finally, to benediction though the image is familiar and ready-made:

> I walked on,
> Simple and poor, while the air crumbled
> And broke on me generously as bread.[131]

"Pieta", the book's title poem, expresses the ambiguity of Thomas's position:

> And in the foreground
> The tall Cross,
> Sombre, untenanted,
> Aches for the Body
> That is back in the cradle
> Of a maid's arms.[132]

Almost from exhaustion, it seems, Thomas turns in this period to "the cradle of a maid's arms", but "In Church" indicates that the stoicism and acceptance of the book is only temporary:

> There is no other sound
> In the darkness but the sound of a man
> Breathing, testing his faith
> On emptiness, nailing his questions
> One by one to an untenanted cross. [133]

The search for an absent or hidden God is acknowledged to be the poet's typical concern. Belief is crucifixion ("The Journey" in Poetry for Supper describes "the tall/Tree to which the believer is nailed"[134]) and life is essentially a thing to be endured:

> What I see: the golden landscape
> Of nature, with the twisted creatures,
> Crossing it, each with his load. [135]

In "This To Do" (Pietà), Thomas writes

> I have this that I must do ...
> .... go down into the green
> Darkness to search for the door
> To myself in dumbness and blindness ... [136]

Thomas sees this search, naturally enough, as a private, intellectual commitment:

> It was the mind's weight
> Kept me bent, as I grew tall. [137]

Or, again from The Bread of Truth:

> The real fight goes on
> In the mind; [138]

In Frequencies (1978), the idea is still very much present:

> The best journey to make
> Is inward. It is the interior
> that calls. [139]

I have argued that R S Thomas's effectiveness as a poet recording the spiritual battles of his day and using the nature and rural environment of Wales to do this, is much curtailed by comparison with Ted Hughes.[140] Thomas is restricted in the very places where Hughes has freedom of role and persona. Hughes manipulates bourgeois structures of feeling, as in Gaudete, while Thomas, apart from experimental exceptions like "The Minister", chooses to work within

such structures. Though, in 1958, we find him writing occasional expressionistic poems like the excellent "On a Line from Sandburg" (Poetry for Supper), it is not until H'm (1972) that Thomas really tries to allow his poetic search or vision to define its own style.

In his three main publications of the 1970's, H'm (1972), Laboratories of the Spirit (1975) and Frequencies (1978), Thomas closes with the question of the nature of God as though to resolve it once and for all, while the firm, local context of priest and people is replaced by a more shadowy technological world in which Thomas's dissenting voice finally comes to speak for his version of God.[141]

"Once", the first poem in H'm, opens in a challenging manner as though to establish a fresh tone capable of dealing with any meta-physical paradox:

> God looked at space and I appeared[142]
> Rubbing my eyes at what I saw.

The poem has a relaxed familiarity with Evolution ("... the many faces/ Of life, hungry for birth") and ends by introducing the Frankenstein of the book:

> We went forth to meet the Machine.[143]

Neither God nor "the Machine" ever takes on full, independent dramatic life within the book, but there certainly is a new energy abroad pressing against the confines of traditional structures of feeling. In "He", for example, the tension is plain. Nature is used freshly and convincingly, while the more familiar register of religious language ("holds out his two hands", "take my life", "yields him"[144]) is smooth and inert.

Thomas's basic philosophical position, with God as "that great absence/In our lives"[145], is unchanged, but stylistically H'm reaches out to a free, experimental mode. In poems like "Parry", "Making" and "Female", R S Thomas uses a "gaming" approach like that of Hughes in

Crow. The poem becomes a try-out in sparse, expressionistic forms of language, an exercise that might, it is implied, lead anywhere. But for all his daring (in "Repeat" God turns from Man "as from his own/ Excrement"[146]), Thomas gives the impression of working against his own temperament. As a Christian, he wants irreconcilable questions brought together, even if that means the grim dead-lock of the book's title poem. While his God remains involved with human moral concerns, Thomas is unable, for all the experimentation, to imaginatively re-cast his theological foundations. However rebellious and heretical the poems ("Rough" in Laboratories is perhaps the most extreme example), the underlying attitude is one of unalterable faith. Such poems, consequently, mostly express incomprehension and anger. They strain at the fixed point of their belief and a sense of impotence overcomes the quality of their insights. It is only through mysticism, in which faith is undiminished by uncertainty and ignorance, that Thomas, in the volumes following H'm, is able to retain his convictions and bear witness to the harsh realities he sees around him.

In its use of nature, Thomas's poetry in the seventies is highly sensitive to change. His old-style conservativism (see "Period" or "The Times") means he rejects fashionable reference to the contemporary, but his determination to meet and think through the real conditions around him gives his poetry some of its best features. Even "No Answer" from H'm in the early seventies, in which Thomas is still formally opposing Science to Religion, incorporates a striking image of nuclear fall-out before its more derivative conclusion:

> The nucleus
> In the atom awaits
> Our bidding. Come forth,
> We cry, and the dust spreads
> Its carpet. Over the creeds
> And masterpieces our wheels go.[147]

In "Nuclear" from The Way of It (1977) Thomas, discussing our inability to hear or recognise the speech of God, turns to the same theme, though this later poem very easily diverts the material to its own use:

> What word so explosive
> as that one Palestinian
> word with the endlessness of its fall-out?

"Praise", also from The Way of It, ends with a similar combination of calm theological sophistication and contemporary natural (here, microbiological) imagery:

> You speak
> all languages and none,
> answering our most complex
> prayers with the simplicity
> of a flower, confronting
> us, when we would domesticate you
> to our uses, with the rioting
> viruses under our lens.[149]

Thomas's poetic imagination presses him to respond to such scientific concepts and incorporate them in his thinking, although his evaluation of Nature stays much as it was when he wrote in his "Introduction" to Selected Poems of Edward Thomas in 1964:

> Those who are mindful of the vanishing features
> of the English country-side and anxious to preserve
> them, will find in Edward Thomas one who loved
> them as they do. But there are more
> lasting aspects of country living, the ever-
> changing moods of nature and weather, which
> can say deep things to the human spirit.[150]

In "Postscript" and "The River" from H'm, for example, "among the forests/Of metal the one human/Sound was the lament of/The poets for deciduous language"[151] and Nature is traditionally conceived of as a source of refreshment and strength; while in Laboratories of the Spirit he can still write a complete poem, "The Bright Field", which reduces his response to the level of "messages and lessons from Nature".

It is not only in his nature poetry that Thomas shows this strange combination of traditional values, usually expressed in second-hand imagery, and a critical contemporary awareness, usually presented with

imaginative originality:

> One voice, quieter than the rest,
> Was heard, bemoaning the loss
> Of beauty. Men put it on tape
> For the future, a lesson in style.[152]

Thomas's most trenchant criticisms of modern life, which derive from very clear convictions, are frequently and unobtrusively made in imagery which is full of an awareness of change. Any disappointment, as in the first part of the verse above, is very much to do with his attempts to go beyond criticism and positively <u>state</u> his value position - just as his attempts to justify his role as priest undermined the complexity of much of his earlier poetry of rural society.

Even in his most recent poetry, Thomas turns too easily to a traditional stock of language and sentiment to indicate his basic religious values. "The Hand", in drawing on the story of Jacob wrestling with the Angel, fails to find its own words and feelings:

> But the hand wrestled with him. 'Tell
> me your name', it cried, 'and I will write it
> in bright gold. Are there not deeds
> to be done, children to make, poems
> to be written? The world
> is without meaning, awaiting
> my coming'.[153]

Rhetoric and preacher's cliché run throughout this poem and the next one in <u>Laboratories of the Spirit</u> - "The Word".

Other poems using the theological variation and inversion of <u>Crow</u> and <u>H'm</u> (e.g. "Amen", "God's Story", "The Tool", "The Problem" in <u>Laboratories of the Spirit</u> and "The Woman" and "Play" in <u>Frequencies</u>) still do not constitute a departure from a traditional structure of feeling, though I would see them as straining Christian theology to breaking-point. As answers to "the problem of pain" or the reconciliation of the idea of a loving God with the facts of the Creation, Thomas's poems often point to the Devil or to a non-Christian God, yet unlike Hughes, he can never really re-cast the whole world of

the poem to present such conclusions. Christianity can never, for Thomas, be what it is for Hughes - "another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit".[154] For Thomas, the Incarnation is history's major event as he makes clear in the fine poem "Those Times" in The Way Of It. Thomas's calling of his God to court may be an exercise of integrity and necessity but finally it is fretful and sterile as much of his other poetry admits. A E Dyson, however, sees such poems as crucial for modern Christians. He is determined that "Amen" ("I am tempted to wonder what poet or sceptic could write a more effective anti-Christian poem, if he wanted to"[155]) shall be constructive, though this involves a panic-stricken kind of analysis - is it "another trial exploration ... on the very edges and outer boundaries of faith" or does Thomas "offer this poem as a temptation to the fashionable reviewers who still ignore his work, but might swallow this?"[156] He concludes, "'Amen' seems to me to be a poem poised at a cross-roads. Either you do not come to it, preferring a view of life which bypasses the territory; or you go past it, to join those who kneel in prayer".[157] But Dyson can only bring the poem to this extrinsic conclusion ("Amen" ends "God needs his martyrdom./ The mild eyes stare from the Cross/in perverse triumph. What does he care/that the people's offerings are so small?"[158]) by over-ruling it with its own context:

> I would suggest that "Amen" along with all these poems, should be read as an artefact; and the "meaning" searched in, and through, the volume as a whole.[159]

"Amen" is the bitter and deliberately unenlightened reading of a tormented Christian and in that sense is a poem of feeling not intellect.[160]

It is not on the strength of such poems that A M Allchin endorses Dyson's high evaluation of R S Thomas.[161] Allchin's article in Theology welcomes Thomas back as a Christian poet:

> And then quite suddenly it was as though we had emerged from a long tunnel ... It becomes clear in Laboratories of the Spirit that we are encountering a major religious poet, one who is rightly to be compared with the greatest of his predecessors, a George Herbert, a Gerard Manley Hopkins.[162]

Thomas arranges the order of his poems very carefully and Allchin rightly points to the significance of "Emerging", the first poem in Laboratories of the Spirit. To look ahead, briefly, "Pilgrimages", the last poem of Frequencies, ends:

> Was the pilgrimage
> I made to come to my own
> self, to learn that in times
> like these and for one like me
> God will never be plain and
> out there, but dark rather and
> inexplicable, as though he were in here?[163]

This quiet mysticism, plainly expressed and likely to be of most interest to believers for its content, confirms Thomas's return to the fold. It promises more of the hermetic Christianity[164] of Laboratories of the Spirit, as in "The Moon in Lleyn" ("You must remain/kneeling"[165]) or "Llananno" - more of the renunciation of "The Flower". It is probably here, as a devotional poet, that Thomas's importance will eventually be granted, but in reading the excerpt below from "Emerging", which fore-shadows the conclusion of "Pilgrimages", it is worth noting the familiar mix of worn values and language and sharp, contemporary response:

> Hear my prayer, Lord, hear
> my prayer. As though you were deaf, myriads
> of mortals have kept up their shrill
> cry, explaining your silence by
> their unfitness.
> It begins to appear
> this is not what prayer is about.
> It is the annihilation of difference,
> the consciousness of myself in you,
> of you in me; the emerging
> from the adolescence of nature
> into the adult geometry
> of the mind. I begin to recognise
> you anew, God of form and number.[166]

After the tired, creaking phrases ("myriads of mortals", "shrill cry") and the easy, pulpit tag ("myself in you... you in me") comes a dense and precise phrase - "adult geometry of the mind". The way, the poem concludes, is "onward to the tall city/of glass that is the laboratory of the spirit".[167] Whenever laboratory, crucible or microscope occur, and whenever Thomas uses the imagery of molecules or viruses, his poems seem to revive and sharpen, for such material has had to force its way into the poem almost against the poet's will:

> I am where
> I am, a being with no
> view but out upon the uncertainties
> of the imperatives of science.[168]

The acceptance of partiality and uncertainty is under-pinned by recognition that our limited knowledge is nevertheless the only element we have to exist in. In "Roger Bacon", science, "the hole in God's side",[169] is a way of believing in God, but the irony turns here, as it did for Doubting Thomas, on the limited usefulness of physical evidence of the Resurrection. In other poems, "Dialectic" in Frequencies most obviously, Thomas ranks the sciences with the traditional power of language:

> They spoke to him in Hebrew and he understood
> them; in Latin and Italian and
> he understood them. Speech palled
> on them and they turned to the silence
> of their equations ...
> ... They are speaking to me still,
> he decided, in the geometry
> I delight in, in the figures
> that beget more figures. I will answer
> them as of old with the infinity
> I feed on.[170]

The end of the poem indicates once more the mystical core of the poem - the unreachability of God:

> ... the truth that with much labour
> is born with them and is to be
> sloughed off like some afterbirth of the spirit.[171]

Science is acknowledged to be vital ("the truth") but relative ("afterbirth of the spirit").

Thomas is able, in such poems, to maintain his traditional convictions because mysticism is non-dogmatic. In the lines below, he is wryly suspicious of his own "modernisations", but, significantly enough, his imagination turns to contemporary resources to express a mystical view:

> I modernise the anachronism
>
> of my language, but he is no more here
> than before. Genes and molecules
> have no more power to call
> him up than the incense of the Hebrews
>
> at their altars. My equations fail
> as my words do. What resource have I
> other than the emptiness without him of my whole being, a vacuum he may not abhor?[172]

In R S Thomas, conservative political and religious ideas undergo constant questioning. His imagination resists the constraints of his orthodox religious beliefs, but like Gerard Manley Hopkins, he responds uneasily to social and cultural change. At the centre of both poets is the need for an unchanging metaphysical reality and in this respect they are temperamentally close to Dylan Thomas; for though Dylan Thomas never identified his God, his poetry of celebration and praise gives a similar effect of a known centre. The great difference to note in turning to Ted Hughes is the sudden importance of the unknown and the unexpected. "Negotiation" is the key-note and as one works through Hughes's poetry it becomes clear that what is being negotiated is the relationship of an historically specific moment to the powers of the universe, in the language of Hughes, or the common rhythms underlying human existence, in that of Jung. Hughes, Hopkins, Dylan Thomas and R S Thomas share the desire to reconnect, restore and heal through metaphysical nature poetry, but only Hughes puts the specificity of present being and perception unequivocally before belief.

CHAPTER SIX

TED HUGHES

(i) Disposition and development

At the end of Chapter V I suggested that in Ted Hughes, the unknown, the unexpected, the "specificity of present being and perception" are all of prime importance: in Hughes, the poet negotiates "the relationships of an historically specific moment to the powers of the universe". To do this, Hughes mythologises, in culturally mediated terms, his "sensory, creative interaction with the environment".* In this kind of pluralistic, unorthodox metaphysical enquiry, myth is used, not as a system, but as multiple, free-ranging imagery. Hughes brings coherence to this diversity through the seriousness of his enquiry, an enquiry that is to do with adjustments to human feeling and response, not with articulated explanation. In Hughes, we feel the centrality of human concerns, freed of incidental connections and messages, and this is characteristic of the religious use of nature in the Wordsworthian tradition. Wordsworth's own poetry matches and expresses "states of feeling and of thought coloured by feeling" experienced before nature, both our "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings" and our "sense of the indomitableness of the Spirit within us".[1] As metaphysical enquiry, Wordsworth's poetry explains man's paradoxical sense of personal belonging and control, and his feeling of insignificance and powerlessness before Nature. The enquiry functions to place humanity within Nature, to reconcile and adjust. I have been claiming that poetry of the natural and rural world has been written within this Wordsworthian tradition in the twentieth century, by Hardy, Frost, Edward Thomas and Lawrence. In contemporary poetry, Ted Hughes is the living continuation of this tradition.

It is true that only a few of the poems in The Hawk in the Rain (1957) and Lupercal (1960) are nature poems, but as these are mostly the best

* See above pp 17, 18.

poems in those collections it is not surprising that Hughes gained an early reputation as a nature poet. Poems such as "The Hawk in the Rain", "The Thought-Fox" and "Wind" in the first collection, and "November", "Pike", "Snowdrop", "Bull Moses" and "Crow Hill", in Lupercal are matched by very few of the non-nature poems, perhaps only by "Six Young Men" and "The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar".

In Poetry in the Making (1967) Hughes describes his childhood absorption in wild-life and nature[2] and it is tempting to link his advice to young writers to write about what they know ("you cannot write about something for which you have no feeling"[3]) with the success of these nature poems. The observation is acute and individual and the language has a very concrete task which the poet keeps under strict surveillance. In "The Thought-Fox", capturing the essence of the fox and tracing the analogy with the creative process is perfectly harmonised. The fused, poised title speaks for this. In "Wind" Hughes shows the same control in his animation of the landscape and the house. The ship comparison of the first verse, right for the darkness and night, is modulated at noon into the image of scaling the house-side as far as the coal-house door: we still think of a ship but the poem does not insist the mind stay there. Then, in the last two stanzas, the psychological point of the poem is met direct as the strain on the house measures the tenacity of the people in it ("The house rang like some fine green goblet in the note/That any second might shatter it" and "the roots of the house move, but (we) sit on"[4]). These early nature poems are very much within Hughes's capabilities; good but not urgent poems, like "Esther's Tomcat" and "View of a Pig", became favourite poems in school class-rooms. They are satisfying and delightful but they are undisturbed by any attempts to locate new meanings. Hughes, though, was bound to move beyond such poems, bound to take risks and to follow thought and hyperbole through - sometimes into

obscurity and strain.

Hughes's view of the poet's task is single-minded and traditional:

> The poet's only hope is to be infinitely sensitive to what his gift is, and this in itself seems to be another gift that few poets possess.[5]

In the same short essay he praises Yeats for "pursuing those adventures, mental, physical and spiritual, whatever they may be".[6] It is a view of the poet that owes much to Eliot, for in it the poet is answerable only to himself, not to his audience or society at large. When Sagar wrote that "in the case of Hughes his faults are very closely related to his strengths and perhaps inseparable from them"[7], he was not making a tiresome defence that could equally well be applied to any poet, for all the attacks on Hughes as the extremist with a relationship of "sniggering voyeurism to his themes"[8] miss the point that throughout his work so far, Hughes's first principle has been to follow his gift - and his feeling for violent (or vital) energy, as I hope to show later, is a big part of this gift. Calvin Bedient's switch-back account of Hughes's work does not pay enough attention to Hughes's consistency and determination. As Hughes has said of one of his books, "A lot of my second book Lupercal is one extended poem about one or two sensations".[9] Bedient's explanation of Lupercal's success, on the other hand, is that after the voyeuristic The Hawk in the Rain, Hughes is now "a fearful lover of the will to live ... the rhetorical fumes have lifted" and Hughes now looks out on a pristine world "matured by awe".[10] By Crow, however, Bedient thinks Hughes's energy "has largely dwindled to a nagging thing of the voice"[11] and "where the Wodwo manner confesses anxiety, the new manner reeks of disgust, races with horror".[12] But Hughes's work is much more of an organic whole than this view admits and in moving now to a consideration of the inadequacies of The Hawk in the Rain and Lupercal I shall argue that the failures are worth looking at because they illuminate Hughes's later successes.

"October Dawn"[13] seems to me to be a typical transition poem. The grounded experience is there and Hughes's imagination is beginning to transform it into a strong area of emotion, a poem "that makes an effect"[14] but something distracting comes in: probably it is the grim delight of Mammoth and Sabre-tooth celebrating reunion or the poster-sized "fist of cold" squeezing the fire at the core of the world and the heart. The feelings emanating from these last stanzas arise by chain reaction and do not return one to the poem's centre or "effect". "The Martyrdom of Bishop Farrar" is a fine poem somewhat marred, in the same way, by figurative language chafing at the bit. The marvellous phrase "annuities of hours" (the secure and comfortable old age that the martyred Bishop gives up) leads to a chain of money images that gets farther and farther from the poem's densest feelings:

> When they saw what annuities of hours
> And comfcrtable blood he burned to get
> His words a bare honouring in their ears,
> The shrewd townsfolk pocketed them hot:
> Stamp was not current but they rang and shone
> As good gold as any queen's crown.
> Gave all he had, and yet the bargain struck
> To a merest farthing his whole agony,
> His body's cold-kept miserdom of shrieks
> He gave uncounted .....[15]

One detects in these gunpowder trails of images, Hughes's admiration for the improvising energy of early seventeenth century language. He feels that,

> In spite of its Elizabethan ruff, Shakespeare's language is somehow nearer to the vital life of English, still, than anything written down since. One reason for this is that it is the virtuoso development of the poetic instincts of English dialect. [16]

And he praises Shakespeare's language for its,

> ... air of being invented in a state of crisis, for a terribly urgent job, a homely spur-of-the-moment improvisation out of whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying around ....[17]

The most important thing Hughes'sown childhood taught him "was to speak West Yorkshire dialect, which is really what I write"[18], yet his own voice, which is strikingly dialect-based, does not easily accommodate that seventeenth-century roughness of style with its confidence that the thought will come through the allusive imagery or violated syntax:

> "... wit and lucky looks
> were a ring disabling this pig-snout,
> And a tin-clasp on a diamond".
>
> By this he meant to break out of the dream
> Where admiration's giddy mannequin
> Leads every sense to motley;[19]

Other critical precepts receive too literal an application in Hughes's poetry, like his belief that a living poem is made up of "words which belong directly to one of the five senses. Or words which act and seem to use their muscles, like 'flick' or 'balance'".[20] There are the over-loaded ends of poems, for example, with sense impressions heavily superimposed cn each other:

> Hearing the horizons endure.
> ("The Horses")[21]
> Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.
> ("Wind")[22]
> Over the roofs go his eyes and outcry.
> ("Esther's Tomcat")[23]

And there is the obtrusive quantity of nouns used as verbs ("whale-monstered", "Englished", "polestars", "tigering", etc) and the technique of very deliberately separating things through using a contraction,that has become a cliché of Hughes'sstyle - "my each feather", "my each step", "their every thought", etc. As recently as 1975 he can still write "his each wing-beat" of a falcon. These characteristics of Hughes'swork should not be viewed as emotionally crude or bullying. They are (albeit unsuccessful) early attempts to depict the particular feel of things and the processes of life. There are many parallels with Lawrence, but a big difference between the two is that Hughes does not place himself in emotional relationship to his subject as Lawrence does. There is always

an overt human slant to Lawrence's observation whereas Hughes generally maintains emotional neutrality; it is the thing itself that he is after. Later he develops this into an impersonal rhetorical style which is frequently cinematic.

For Hughes, the humanist position, that to do anything constructive at all we must accept man as the measure of all things, has nothing to do with poetry, for a writer's poetic gift "has none of the obvious attachment to publicly exciting and seemingly important affairs that his other mental activities have and in which all his intelligent contemporaries have such confidence".[24]

"Obvious attachment" is the key phrase, for Hughes does see all good art as inevitably sensitive to its age. He advises us to look to the superficially unlikely poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake if we wish to see the important issues of the 20 years following the French Revolution, fcr the spirit of the age "chose them for its parables. And looking back now, if we wish to see the important issues of those two decades, we see nothing so convincing and enlightening to so many of us, as the spirit which seems to touch us openly and speak to us directly through these poems".[25]

Hughes rejects, then, the single human perspective which humanist criticism such as Donald Davie's or Ian Hamilton's apparently requires. Hamilton talks of testing literature against reality[26] and Davie talks of the real landscape of modern Britain[27], but for Hughes there are as many "realities" as thinking and sentient creatures. This is stated very clearly at the end of "A Woman Unconscious" in Lupercal, and in "The Man Seeking Experience Enquires His Way Of A Drop of Water", the man expects the drop of water to "read us a lesson, a plain lesson", and he waits in vain to receive a message as he "listened for himself to speak for the drop's self"[28]. This listening to oneself speaking in everything one experiences is the most frequent human arrogance, to Hughes. It is a crime

against the variety and difference of the world:

This droplet was clear simple water still .

Hughes is resisting here the frequent contemporary formula of "sharp description and pertinent reflection = effective nature lyric". In this model, credibility is established according to the quality of detail, the energy and ingenuity of presentation and the appropriateness of the concluding moral. The amateurish philosophy of these poems represents a kind of neo-Georgianism directly opposed to the organic lyrics of Hughes. As examples, I have taken two poems from the seventies anthology Poetry Dimension. Gail Robinson's "Ram Dying" (1972), goes for a shrewd mixture of "poetic" language - traditional/Georgian ("loom", "palls", "bellows"), sensuous/muscular ("sea-washing blood rush", "rancid-wet"), contemporary/ relevant ("goose-step") etc:

Ram dying
on his knees, head buttressed
between horns emptying
of the sea-waking blood rush.
Wool also dying (shears will not
now mount the gloss on the loom) drips
rancid-wet from the body's fringes.
Palls of ravens
goose-step and strut
intent upon the cooling liquid
of devil-slit of eye; the flanks
have ceased their bellows pant. [29]

The concluding section dallies with thoughts of the old order yielding place to new as a younger ram (suggestively called a "juggernaut") enters the mountain kingdom laid out below him. The philosophical "response", then, is a gentle strumming of selected chords, partly modern and partly traditional.

In Edward Lowbury's "Peacock", published some five years later, the opening descriptive section is not dissimilar in its attempted exploitation of language:

As if the ultramarine of crest, breast,
Neck and the cry of "rape!" were not enough
To startle one,
The peacock hoists an emperor's parasol
Inset with irridescent paste, fringed

With flakes of sun,
Sparks, flames ... Treading the moist lawn
He nods absurdly with each weighty step
Impossible -
Were it not for the evidence of a hundred eyes![30]

Description then gives way to a meditation on natural selection ("he looks/More like a last fling before the extinction/Of all such tricks ;..") with a Concluding Thought about Man:

Like man who outreaches death, but
knowing the end
Is near, makes preparation for that departure
His gaudiest feat.

Hughes's poem "The Bull Moses" in Lupercal[31], by contrast, presents a fusion of meditation and description. There is no simple extraction of message or moral. Hughes is wary and respectful, so that the bull emerges as much in its own right as a part of Hughes's meditation on the mysterious potency of consciousness, locked-up but just approachable. The movement of the poem is a welling-up and sinking back played all the time against the lumbering, deliberate nature of the bull. There is some strain here and there, it is true, but as with all Hughes's animal poems, Lawrence's too, the creature emerges unscathed. From their beginnings, poems that use nature effectively for metaphysical or philosophical enquiry are marked by caution - they keep their distance, becoming self-reliant as their enquiry seems to be accepted by the "host". It is this cautious, integrated approach that distinguishes Hughes and Lawrence and not just that they have a weight of imaginative/philosophical interest behind their nature poems, though they have that too.

In his poetry, Hughes is not reading Nature for humanistic messages but for its range and quality of life processes (his first concern being to grant independence to the natural world colonised by humanism),although, because these processes are mediated through his human faculties,we are always aware of analogues with human life. Hughes has, therefore, always been on trial for covert fascism, admiring violence and mindless power,

being prepared "to say farewell to the civilisation on which would depend (a moral judgement of his work)"[32] and "turning the poet once more into the world-loser and world-forsaker".[33] Counsel for the defence has pointed to the liberal reformist poem "Wilfred Owen's Photographs" and has countered the prosecution's reading of poems like "Hawk Roosting" with its own explanations:

> The poem opposes, in a moral-political sense, the violence which it dramatises.[34]

J D Hainsworth described "Hawk Roosting" as another anti-violence poem. He read it as making fun of the limitations of the creature's consciousness and wondered how the last verse "can fail to provoke laughter at the hawk's expense".[35] (Hughes himself has described the poem as the monologue of a hawk "preening internally" to "boost his hawkish morale".[36]) The case for Hughes could be strengthened by quoting from Poetry in the Making where, as educationist, he is clearly though guardedly on the side of the progressives:

> In these talks I assume that the latent talent for self-expression in any child is immeasurable. As I say, this is very likely false, and even if it were true no teacher could arrange for the psychological crises and the long disciplines that awaken genius in an otherwise ordinary mind. But by showing to a pupil's imagination many opportunities and few restraints, and instilling into him confidence and a natural motive for writing, the odds are that something - maybe not much, but something - of our common genius will begin to put a word in.[37]

There is an optimism about human creativity underlying the whole book which is found too in Hughes's involvement with other educational enterprises like the Arvon Foundation.[38]

Hughes himself, determined only to discover and follow his gift, is not very concerned about the outcome of this debate (which flares up

fiercely again over Crow) but he always does assume that poetry is basically philosophical or religious:

> But poetic imagination is determined finally by the state of negotiation - in a person or in a people - between man and his idea of the Creator. This is natural enough, and everything else is naturally enough subordinate to it. How things are between man and his idea of the Divinity determines everything in his life, the quality and connectedness of every feeling and thought, and the meaning of every action.[39]

How the poet perceives and explores this metaphysical relationship depends on social factors - the language and styles available and current structures of feeling and ways of seeing reality - in his essay at the end of A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse and in his contribution to "Context" (the poets' forum in the London Magazine for February 1962), Hughes's thought is under-pinned by this relativistic view of artistic perception. I would also argue that Hughes's best poetry incorporates great sensitivity to contemporary conditions and change, but Hughes's main reactions to modern life, like Lawrence's, are still mostly unsympathetic and critical. Much in modern life, to Hughes, prevents negotiation between man and his idea of the Creator. There is a sense, too, in which the early Hughes refuses the scale and complexity of modern life: in "A Woman Unconscious" there is impatience and a lack of resourcefulness in the reductio:

> And though bomb be matched against bomb,
> Though all mankind wince out and nothing endure -
> Earth gone in an instant flare -
> Did a lesser death come
>
> Onto the white hospital bed
> Where one, numb beyond her last of sense,
> Closed her eyes on the world's evidence[40]
> And into pillows sunk her head.

But if this poem refuses to help redefine the sensibility of the age, almost any page of Crow will compensate for its shortcomings.

Hughes's poem "The Ancient Heroes and the Bomber Pilot" is often cited as another such fantasising withdrawal, as one of his "outbursts of hero-worship"[41] written about "almost girlishly"[42], but this poem does comment very finely on the fearfulness of mechanised warfare and the enormity of suffering obscured by the film-view of distance:

> Even though I can boast
> The enemy capital will jump to a fume
> At a turn of my wrist
>
> And the huge earth be shaken in its frame,[43]

Beneath the poem runs that familiar contempt for the arrogance of the man who lives physically separated from the implications of his mental development. There is no such redeeming subtlety in "The Retired Colonel" in Lupercal, which is content to lapse into merely extravagant nostalgia. From a whimsical opening verse, the poem gradually slips into straight identification with the presumed values of this "Mafeking stereotype", a type more penetratingly considered by John Osborne in his Colonel Redfern[44]. Hughes takes his own exaggeration too seriously:

> And what if his sort should vanish?
> The rabble starlings roar upon
> Trafalgar. The man-eating British lion
> By a pimply age brought down.[45]

There is a reluctance to reinterpret in this: where we can appreciate the colonel's gruff dismissal, the poet's importunate "and what if his sort should vanish?" marks an inadequacy of thought and feeling made all the more obvious by the poem's final claim to be playful:

> Here's his head mounted, though only in rhymes.

Hughes quarrels with modern science and materialism because they appear to reduce our (religious) apprehension of the wonder and force of life. In the poem "Childbirth",

> Miracle struck out the brain
> Of order and ordinary: bare
> Onto the heart the earth dropped then ...[46]

The Anglo-Saxon inversion at the end of that third line is one of the poem's ways of marking the amazement of birth, that time when "the commonplace became so strange"[47]. The line contains, too, the start of a conceit that runs throughout the poem and that forms the philosophical base for Hughes's poetry - the idea that subjective experience dwarfs objective reality. Hughes's imagination does not just work on behalf of people, creatures and things, (the "woman unconscious" etc): instead, he speaks out of their experience. This is essentially dramatic, as the poem "Wodwo" is or as the Crow poems are. Because of this philosophical principle, his nature poetry remains unsentimental, though providing psychological analogues, and he is able to establish the dignity and difference of everything he writes about.[48] No poet has sensed so finely the nuclear power of life, its ability to hold off the inert masses around it:

> this harebell,
> That trembles, as under threats of death,
> In the summer turf's heat-rise,
> And in which - filling veins
> Any known name of blue would bruise
> Out of existence - sleeps, recovering,
>
> The maker of the sea.[49]
>
> ("Still Life")

These beautiful lines bring home, as the poem "Snowdrop" in Lupercal does, how extreme even the most gentle form of life must be, but they belong completely to our age. In them science has autonomy: the potency of the lines is only there because, however vaguely, we refer them to our knowledge of rain-cycles and the hydraulic force of plant cells. In this way, Hughes's poetry actually complements science, though science normally, he seems to feel, lulls us into a false and sacrilegious security. For the Western world this is the age of control, with birth and death appearing as statistics, the life-struggle taking place scientifically in hospitals often far beyond the individual's influence,

and day-to-day survival - the caution and food-gathering - replaced by huge, predictable, taken-for-granted systems. To Hughes, we only partially know and experience existence. His poems revive our sense of life's marvellous extremity, which is usually obscured and unknown to us in spite of our flesh and blood:

> What humbles these hills has raised
> The arrogance of blood and bone,
> And thrown the hawk upon the wind,
> And lit the fox in the dripping ground.[50]
> ("Crow Hill")

Hughes hates man the egg-head's illusion of understanding with his "braggart-browed complacency" stopping "the looming mouth of the earth with a pin-/point cipher" and "opposing his eye's flea-red/Fly-catching fervency to the whelm of the sun".[51] He hates the intellect outstripping the body's interaction with its physical environment, and mental man with the "skull-splitting polyp of his brain, on its tiny root".[52] ("Wings" from Wodwo.) His work is full of desk-people shocked out of their computer-like mental control, city-people made to confront the physical terms of life with its fear and threat, and secure people upset by unfamiliar experience.[53] For these uncertainties of life and complacency-breaking upheavals, the First World War exists in the poetry as a vast metaphor, more vivid and personally meaningful for Hughes himself because "his father, William Hughes, a carpenter, was one of the seventeen men from his entire regiment who returned from the Dardanelles".[54]

Much of the critical debate about English poetry since the Second World War has revolved around the rather disarming question of what life is really like. Robert Conquest's 1956 "Introduction" to New Lines, the Movement poets' anthology, gave one answer which produced the quiet, domestic, sceptical, Little England kind of poetry so despised by many American poets and critics of the fifties and sixties and so successfully developed and refined by Philip Larkin:

> I believe ... it (this poetry of the fifties) submits
> to no great systems of theoretical constructs nor

> agglomerations of unconscious commands. It is
> free from both mystical and logical compulsions
> and - like modern philosophy - is empirical in its
> attitude to all that comes.[55]

Donald Davie would agree that life is like that: whereas Larkin's landscapes and weathers are literally and metaphorically true to the England we all know "violated and subtopianised and poisoned as it is", Hughes gives us "more an Irish landscape than an English one".[56] But Davie's real criticism of Hughes is that he will not, as Larkin does, see the English landscape as symbolising the grey, "subtopianised" mood of modern Britain. For Larkin there is a melancholy pastoral in the ravaged, industrialised landscape and there is comfort in surrender ("No, give me my in-tray ... Help me down Cemetery Road"[57]), but his reality is monolithic and can only mean one thing. For Hughes, life is perpetually adaptable and self-renewing and holds many realities and meanings.

In "Mayday on Holderness", Hughes too sees today's England:

> From Hull's sunset smudge
> Humber is melting eastward, my south skyline:
> A loaded single vein, it drains
> The effort of the inert North - Sheffield's ores,
> Bog pools, dregs of toadstools, tributary
> Graves, dunghills, kitchens, hospitals.
> The unkillable North Sea swallows it all.[58]

He also sees the hidden world of the "creepy-crawly and the root", the "eye-guarded eggs in the hedgerows,/Hot haynests under the roots in burrows" and the teeming life of the pond:

> I look down into the decomposition of leaves
> The furnace door whirling with larvae.[59]

In Wodwo, in poems like "Ghost Crabs" and "Wodwo" itself, Hughes intensifies his effort to experience and express what he sees as the multiplicity of reality.

P J Kavanagh's attack on Hughes goes a step beyond Davie's argument that poetry's prime responsibility is to the social and political reality we all recognise ("Are not Hardy and his successors right in severely curtailing for themselves the liberties that other poets continue to

take? Does not the example of the Hardyesque poets make some of those other poets look childishly irresponsible?"[60]). In his vicious poem "The Famous Poet"[61], Kavanagh accuses Hughes of brutalism, pride and self-deception. Yet Kavanagh himself wants to take on the same issues as Hughes. His countryside is decorated with scrap-metal and refuse and ravaged by pheasant shoots. Its plants and creatures are laid to waste by poison and he too cannot forget for long the violent and destructive aspects of life. Look at his effective poem "Like the Heron" or the start of "Just Now":

> A mole on its back with its belly roundly eaten
> Like a red jewel on a black velvet cushion.[62]

I do not want to mount a spurious counter-attack on Kavanagh, but his poem "All I Want" does show a Movement sensibility wilting and retreating before just those realities that Hughes will not ignore. The poem begins self-indulgently:

> All I want to do is sleep
> (Anything to stop me smoking!)

Fears and nightmares grow:

> Something has been murdered in my head,
> Lucky hugs and kisses helped me then,
> Now I only hear the choking
> Voices of the children.
> The banked horrors have been a-stoking.
> I tried hard. Underneath
> They burnt me hollow in my sleep.

The poem ends with no resources, artistic or otherwise, to turn to:

> I do not like myself at all.
> Only a short way to fall.
> I wanted to make a thing for you to keep.
> I cannot do it.
> A hole rots through it.
> I wanted to make a thing for you to keep.[63]
> All I want to do is sleep.

Hughes, in contrast, just as he accepts "the devilishness of many of the greatest passages"[64] of Shakespeare, accepts the devilishness of his own imagination in its effort to be adequate to the metaphysical terrors of our time. He sees these terrors as part of the actual conditions of all

human existence though it may take the dangerous social reality of the worlds of poets such as Holub, Herbert, Popa and Milosz to make us acknowledge these conditions. We "holiday" in our reality, but artists in other parts of the world:

> have had to live out, in actuality, a vision
> which for artists elsewhere is a prevailing shape of
> things but only brokenly glimpsed, through the
> clutter of our civilized liberal confusion. [65]

We are "the spoiled brats of civilization disappointed of impossible and unreal expectations and deprived of the revelations of necessity .." but "they have got back to the simple animal courage of accepting the odds".[66]

The most famous piece of criticism supporting Hughes in this "extremist" position is A Alvarez's 1962 essay "Beyond the Gentility Principle":

> What poetry needs, in brief, is a new
> seriousness. I would define this seriousness
> simply as the poet's ability and willingness
> to face the full range of his experience
> with his full intelligence; not to take the
> easy exits of either the conventional response or choking incoherence.[67]

Alvarez argues that twentieth century "mass evil", coinciding with the revelation of psychoanalysis that "the same forces are at work within us", cannot be answered by "the gentility principle" with its"belief that life is always more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions more or less decent and more or less controllable; that God, in short, is more or less good".[68]

This theory, however, best illuminates the work of Hughes's first wife, Sylvia Plath: Hughes's extremity is more traditional and much less contemporary and "generally relevant, to such things as Hiroshima and Dachau, and so on".[69] Anyone reading Hughes's translation of Seneca's Oedipus, for instance, might well protest that Hughes had really over-reached himself at last. Turning to the original he would find every detail in Seneca.[70] Hughes's historical theory, which echoes

Lawrence but mostly it is not something he has the interest to develop, is similarly a traditional form of extremism in which Calvinism and the traditions it gave rise to are seen as the worst example of mentalism, of theory separated from natural life. Hughes sees Shakespeare's work as exploring this and he takes Venus and Adonis as Shakespeare's archetypes of Nature and Puritan Morality.[71] He traces them through to The Tempest in which Shakespeare "banished Venus, as Sycorax, the blue-eyed hag" and avoided the sexual dilemma by marrying Miranda and Ferdinand:

> But what a wooden wedding! What
> proper little Puritan puppets! And what
> a ghastly expression on Prospero's cynical face.[72]

In "Dully Gumption's Addendum", from Recklings, maggots emerge from the head of "the dead god King" Charles and bite "deep into the brain of the bumpkin English", eating them to mummy skins:

> At grammar school this remorseless strain of maggot
> Behind greying disciplinarian masks
> Of Addison of Gladstone and of Arnold
> Ate into his brain, ate into his brain.[73]

These facets of Hughes's theory need to be introduced in a discussion of his extremism, but they do not make up a very significant part of his work. In answer to Ian Robinson and David Sims's exasperated question "Why isn't Mr Hughes interested enough in getting things just right to write an essay?"[74], one could reply that Hughes's "theory" is at its most vital and really interesting where it is transformed in poetry, as it is so often in Wodwo and Crow.

If Hughes seems to give first place in his work to the "unreality" of fantasy and myth, it is because these are forms of real and necessary experience. And if sometimes he has to elbow modern science out of the way, this has nothing to do with science itself, but only with the human weakness that must interpret all experience through present preoccupations, so that intellectual advance also means

intellectual incursions on the feelings and instincts. Hughes meets this with stubborn antagonism:

> We are satisfied that the real moon exists rolling about in the sky, but we have quite as much evidence for the existence of the dream moon, and as this one is somewhere inside our minds it affects us much more closely than the other, and so ought to be much more our concern. [75]

He does not deny science, but he does not expect it to compete with other forms of knowledge: "to live removed from this inner universe of experience is also to live removed from ourself, banished from ourself and our real life".[76] In "Quest", the reality of the sixth sense coexists with that of the other faithful five:

> I ride, with staring senses, but in
> Complete blackness, knowing none of these faithful five
> Clear to its coming till out of the blind-spot
> Of the fitful sixth-crash on me the bellowing heaving
> Tangle of a dragon all heads all jaws all fangs, [77]

These attitudes do not automatically make Hughes a reactionary, uninterested in meeting contemporary problems. Dorothy Heathcote, who worked in a mill before becoming a teacher of drama for children, has a deep understanding of the realities of educational deprivation, yet her work only meets the social experience of the children through the symbolism of adventure and myth.

There can be as much relevance and contemporary sensitivity in this as in social realism. Nevertheless, the "literary-heroic" in the early work of Hughes is often associated with failures and inadequacies in the structure of feeling, and it is important to consider this, before turning to the achievement of Wodwo and Crow.

Hughes's creative drive is to detail the processes and track down the energy sources of existence and to suggest the breadth and wonder of all the superimposed universes of animate and inaminate Nature. To achieve this is to provide glimpses of great intensity; to attempt the achievement means working the unpliable material of hyperbole and

extremity. For Hughes it is a question of discovering what parts of this material are malleable and how those parts can be shaped. In his early work whole poems, like "The Retired Colonel", which I discussed above, depend on caricatured structures of feeling - poems like "The Ancient Heroes and the Bomber Pilot", "Two Wise Generals", "Roarers in a Ring", "Fair Choice", "The Decay of Vanity", "Soliloquy of a Misanthrope", "Secretary", "Witches" and "Dick Straightup". These are poems of brazen emotional indulgence, frequently misogynistic and only superficially challenging. No shaping of feeling takes place within their language: like his schoolboy poems written "in galloping Kiplingesque rhythms, most of them about Zulus or the Wild West"[78], Hughes is here using sterile material to try to give form to his gift. He is leaning on structures of feeling which are in any case very partial and only seem vigorous because of their self-protective plain speaking.

The language of The Hawk in the Rain and, to a much lesser extent, of Lupercal, often shows Hughes worrying at ways of knowing and feeling that have a surface toughness and excitement but no capacity for resonance. The structure of feeling appearing through this kind of language is archaic and brittle. There are obvious dangers in removing language from its context, but running through these two early volumes there is a band of language that is of almost antiquarian interest besides Hughes's linguistic achievement in Crow. This is a poetry of cliché figures. Consider the following references to people drawn from seventeen of the forty poems in The Hawk in the Rain:

> Strut like cheap tarts, the visionary his cell, like a torturer's iron instrument, fugitive aristocrat, the warrior comes, an apprentice house-painter amid an assembly of famous architects, the great lord from hunting, King's and his Queen's when the senseless mob rules, admiration's giddy mannequin, you were the Queen that crowned me King, sweeps some great Queen towards his bed, makes him my scavenger, a midwife delivering darlings, the vengeful voluble ghosts, an upstart gentleman, the quick ankles of whores, no knave's remorse, faces sweating like hams farmers roared, pretty princess, the condemned prisoner

> stirred, a beggar-man and a rich man, cuckold-maker and cuckold, the pious witness, the bestial gaoler's boot, upon his sinews torturers had grown strong, the dead wait like brides, Black Douglas bannered trumpeted who hacked for the casked heart flung to the enemy, huge-chested braggarts.

Consider,too, the trappings around these figures from <u>The Hawk in the Rain</u>:

> habit of the doggéd grave, prison darkness, black drapery, drums and funeral tread, the burning of his wretched bays, scuttles down the gauntlet of lust, like a hawk into a dovecote, sob contentment towards the moon, licks the vent in its hide, casting their crowns into the pools, tin clasp on a diamond, this royal trophy, the spilt blood be your own, grubbing his get among your lilies, fisting his guilt, blood-prints of the knout, their souls scrolled and supporting the sky, etc, etc.

Though context sometimes improves the value of this kind of idiom (a poem like "The Hay", for example, goes a little way towards exploiting the strength of fairy-tale and fairy-tale language), Hughes has generally chosen to draw on a very unsuggestive and musty range of experience. He is aware of the dangers of this, but unaware perhaps of how often he actually turns to these ways of feeling:

> The archetypes are always there waiting ... swashbuckling Elizabethan, earthy bawdy Merrie Englander, devastatingly witty Restoration blade and so on.[79]

This matter involves much more, though, than just the literary tradition and "our infatuation with our English past in general"[80], for while Hughes is writing in this way he cannot make much use of the resources of living language or of his sensitivity to contemporary life. In "Cleopatra to the Asp", too, an early poem working through myth and history, the attempt to possess the subject and physically enact the ideas (features of Vasko Popa's poetry and of Hughes'sown <u>Crow</u>) is defeated by the fancy-dress diction, the received and un-reinterpreted structure of feeling:

A half-deity out of Capricorn,
This rigid Augustus mounts
With his sword virginal indeed; and has shorn
Summarily the moon-horned river

From my bed. May the moon
Ruin him with virginity! Drink me, now, whole
With coiled Egypt's past; then from my delta
Swim like a fish toward Rome.[81]

Lupercal already points to the way out of this structure of feeling trap, for in it Hughes is beginning to locate the spring that will release the creative forms of Wodwo and Crow. "February" is important in this context. As in many of his "animal poems" Hughes follows the approach of imaginative play over associations with the subject (here it is nibelung wolves, the Red Riding Hood story, etc), but he moves beyond this traditional structure of feeling into a very clearly presented religious statement. In different ways, he is able to uncover our sense of the lost religious significance of the wolf through focussing on the animal's feet - "the hairless, knuckled feet/of the last wolf killed in Britain", the feet printing "the moonlit doorstep" or running "through the hush of parkland, bodiless, headless", the dancing feet of "the scraggy Spanish wolf".[82]

The wolf, through its contact with man, is diminished to a ghost creature only keeping its essence alive in those indestructible feet. This parallels modern man's own separation from physical realities (Nature), though man still has a tenacity of his own connecting him to his origins, a tenacity imaged throughout Lupercal as jaws clamped tight in endurance. The last two verses of "February" have an eerie religious power which works more imaginatively, and therefore more effectively, than the deliberate intellectual encounter with primitive religion in a poem like "Lupercalia",[83] for example. Here is the end of "February":

These feet, deprived,
Disdaining all that are caged, or storied, or pictured,
Through and throughout the true world search
For their vanished head, for the world

Vanished with the head, the teeth, the quick eyes -
Now, lest they choose his head,
Under severe moons he sits making
Wolf-masks, mouths clamped well onto the world.[84]

Like Hughes himself[85], Crag Jack in "Crag Jack's Apostasy" has a vision of God in "an animal's dreamed head", a "memory of a wolf's head, of eagles' feet"[86], but Hughes has fortunately not, like Lawrence, been interested in formulating a literal way of life to correspond to the religious vision of his poetry. To Hughes, as to Plato, literature is antithetical to life. In it, the most fantastic things can and should be experienced, for, as in psychoanalysis dreams are seen as enabling us to cope with life, so does literature cultivate the imagination, freeing it from the rational/scientific paralysis of the day:

> ... a technological civilization is useless, and dangerous, unless it is handled by imaginative minds, or by minds that can move as freely in their imagination as they can move among facts.[87]

Leavis stands here, and behind him Arnold, but more importantly it is a Freudian programme, promising the individual control through recognition of opposing forces.[88]

In some of the Lupercal poems, then, Hughes opens up those structures of feeling and ways of using language that make Wodwo and Crow the best contemporary poetic statements about the present state of negotiation "between man and his idea of the Creator"[89] and it is nature which provides the language for these statements. Hughes's "idea of the Creator", of course, has no special theistic sense. Hamm in Beckett's Endgame says of God "the bastard. He doesn't exist"[90]; the ghosts inside the Sphynx tell Oedipus in Hughes's "Song for a Phallus" that he "will never know/What a cruel bastard God is".[91] Both writers are

manipulating existing conceptions of metaphysics and using metaphysical language metaphorically, in order to approach the world's most basic suffering and absurdity. Hughes's claim that poetry deals with "how things are between man and his idea of the Divinity", which in turn determines everything in a man's life, "the meaning of every action",[92] is a statement about his sense of final realities. Plainly it is nonsense if made of everyday social and economic reality, but it does apply to our life of physical and spiritual sensation - both to the exuberance and harmony of being alive and to the terrible experiences of pain and death. Hughes's background no doubt makes him turn to nature but he also takes it for granted that "the whole world of nature" is "of course what we have to live in, what we are part of, what we grow out of".[93] His poetry is full of this conviction which gives him, like Lawrence, protection against the charge of neo-Georgianism. The essence of neo-Georgianism is the use of Nature to avoid or mystify social reality, while Hughes's "Nature" is truly the basis of social reality. To Hughes we do not holiday in Nature: Nature is the reality we inhabit. The city people of the Wodwo stories discover this, but Hughes is also dealing with the world of those who have never forgotten it, a world typified by those areas of the industrial north of England where town and country are blended and where people frequently live "on a kind of frontier, within sight both of industrial and of agricultural England":[94]

> The valley became narrower and its sides steeper. Road, river and canal made their way as best they could, with only a twenty-yard strip of wasteland - a tangle of rank weeds, elderberry bushes and rubble, bleached debris of floods - separating river and canal. Along the far side of the river squeezed the road, rumbling from Monday to Saturday with swaying lorry-loads of cotton and wool and cloth. The valley wall on that side, draped with a network of stone-walled fields and precariously -clinging farms and woods, came down sheer out of the sky into the backyards of a crouched stone row of weavers' cottages whose front doorsteps were almost part of the road.[95]

Experience, too, is blended. Hughes does not separate the natural from

the artificial, for each provides ways of approaching the other. Consider the imagery of "November" or these lines from "You Drive in a Circle":

> Over old hairy moors, a dark Arctic depth, cresting
> under rain,
> Where the road topples, plunging with its crazed rigging
> Like a rackety iron tanker ....[96]

Hughes's Nature runs much deeper than the town/country polarity.

If this notion of Nature as the starting-point for all activities and ideas often involves violence (or "disasters" as he has called many of the incidents of his recent series of shepherd's poems[97]) it is only as a by-product of his interest in the flash-points of energy he finds in Nature - those moments when "the elemental power circuit of the Universe"[98] is actually evidenced. By the time Crow was published, Hughes was seeing almost anything as a possible lead into this circuit. In "Crow Improvises", disproportionate or incongruous things produce tremendous voltages when brought together:

> So he took his lavender-bag ancestors under one arm
> And his twisting dog under the other -
> The spark that flash-thumped fused his watch of all things,
> And left a black orifice instead of a time-sense.[99]

The poem's wit and inventiveness, working with the technical control and fluidity of a cartoonist[100], serves to present the charge that is in all things, that "grandeur of God" Manley Hopkins found in the creation. Like the unkillable creature of the cartoon, immediately redrawn and so revived, the man in this poem experiences a violent sequence of expressions of energy. The poem concludes with the energy transformed into a smile "not even Leonardo/Could have fathomed" and this "flew off into the air".[101] The Protean escape of indestructible energy is often in the form of a smile, a grin, a laugh in Crow (the whole poem "A Grin" is devoted to the theme), while human attempts to trap this energy are frequently imaged as the subtlety and elusiveness of words ("A Disaster", "The Battle of Osfrontalis", "Crow Goes Hunting", etc) or truth. "Truth Kills Everybody" moves from Crow grimly holding on to every expression of "truth",

A wreath of lashing mambas - but he held it

It was a naked powerline, 2000 volts -
He stood aside, watching his body go blue
As he held it and held it.

to a conclusion using complex but colloquial imagery that caps an apparently ever-expanding series with some cheerfully ominous words,

The earth shrunk to the size of a hand grenade
And he held it he held it and held it and

BANG!

He was blasted to nothing.[102]

This language is typical of Crow's "homely spur-of-the-moment improvisation".[103] It accords with Hughes's expressionistic linguistics:

> ... the deeper into language one goes, the more dominated it becomes by purely musical modes, and the more dramatic it becomes - the more unified with total states of being and with the expressiveness of physical action.[104]

Crow is one of those works, like "The Waste Land" or "Howl", which improvises a poetic language capable of suddenly illuminating our present reality. Where our feelings have reached impasse (about "violence", for example) Crow offers fresh perspectives free of the paralysis and self-indulgence of the old responses: in this and other ways it is an important metaphysical work. The remaining part of this chapter looks at Hughes's poetry from Wodwo on, examining in greater detail how Hughes's nature and rural poetry functions as metaphysical enquiry and assessing the adequacy of the poetry's structure of feeling in changing social circumstances.

(ii) Poetry and shamanism

In his poetry, Ted Hughes functions as a literary shaman or priest. Like Blake, Wordsworth and Lawrence, he offers an individual religious vision to cure what he sees as an ailing society. Unlike a traditional prophet or priest, he has no broad social base or role, though his reputation goes well beyond the small circle of regular readers of new poetry. In this sense he is a successful poet. His readings are packed,

his books sell well[105] and expensive limited editions of his work are in demand. Like Robert Frost he keeps a corner for his own rural work experience[106] but he does not make the Georgian mistake of expecting a sense of complete belonging to follow. He is a solitary and self-contained figure, but his whole literary endeavour, as J M Newton has said of his criticism, is remarkably free of self-concern:

> he is always more concerned with
> the truth than with 'interestingness',
> seeming to have no 'critic's ego' at all.[107]

There is a stubborness about Hughes's bad poetry, a faith that returns him finally to the productive aspects of unpromising ideas, a belief that the truth will emerge and that the poetry will appear as "unimpeachable evidence of itself".[108] He never doubts his artistic function, as he fulfils the mediating role of literary shaman in the "protagonists" of his work. Hughes has summarised the actual business of Shamanism as "the whole procedure and practice of becoming and performing as a witch-doctor, a medicine man, among primitive peoples". The individual, summoned by a spirit usually in the form of an animal or a woman, prepares himself to enter the spirit world. This may take years but "once fully-fledged he can enter trance at will and go to the spirit world ... he goes to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer, some sort of divine intervention in the community's affairs. Now this flight to the spirit world he experiences as a dream ..."[109] Hughes's poems, particularly his most recent sequences, can be seen as literary analogues to such flights. When he describes his poems as bulletins or "ragged dirty undated letters from remote battles and weddings"[110], he is acting as correspondent and negotiator and in the process training himself imaginatively to receive and interpret those energies which, in more harmonious cultures, are handled by the priests and wise men. In our "tame corner of civilisation" animal energy is repressed and Hughes sees his poems as meeting this repression; they are "about the split personality of modern man"[111] and as a literary shaman he provides

symbolic solutions to such repression and conflict.

In Hughes's early poems, people are extreme, familiar types while it is through animals that we "understand what a strange thing is living in this Universe ...some animals and birds express this being pure and without effort, and then you hear the whole desolate, final actuality of existence in a voice, a tone".[112] The furthest metaphysical point that Hughes can reach in these early animal poems is marked by "Second Glance at a Jaguar", a poem that completes his "tapestry of creatures".[113] The poem is a single, breathless tour de force in which pristine observation is abundantly enacted and realised through language.[114] In other poems in Wodwo, "Ghost Crabs", "The Green Wolf", "The Bear", "Song of a Rat", "Skylarks", "Gnat-Psalm", Hughes develops his literary shamanism through a new, more emblematic and metaphysical treatment of creatures. There is an added sense of the narrative and dramatic in these poems. Hughes is working towards a true protagonist, some anti-hero to enter the spirit world for him and so for us. In fact the whole book leads up to the title poem[115], in which Hughes's first real "extra-human" protagonist enters Nature on our behalf ("am I the first"), though still existing primarily through the senses and still subjectively finding himself "the exact centre" in his explorations of "the queerness" of things around him. At the end of the poem ("I'll go on looking"), the peculiar conjunction of a physical body and a questioning consciousness prefigures the rough and holy character of Crow.

Crow, "a lump of ectoplasm, gradually developing a crow shape"[116] is morally innocent. In his encounters and collisions he becomes haphazardly aware of moral realities. "The crow is a sort of extra-man, a shadow-man ... he never does quite become a man."[117] But Crow's humanist critics assume he is a man, stripped or reduced to a shameful determination to survive. Raban says that Crow's "entire being is concentrated into the terrifying, solipsistic art of sheer survival,

Crow has gone beyond society ...."[118] and Robinson and Sims compare Crow unfavourably with Solzhenitsyn's Ivan Denisovich:

> He does not survive by jettisoning his humanity; on the contrary. Ivan Denisovich has all Crow's dodges, and more; but they become more than dodges, and survival more than mere survival, because of the context of Crow-like cunning in a life that also finds room for loyalty, decency, intelligence and perception.[119]

As censure of Shakespeare for creating Iago this would be fallacious enough; as criticism of Hughes's literary ethics in Crow, it begins at quite the wrong end. Crow is an extra-human protagonist, proceeding without assumptions or preconceptions and allowing Hughes to achieve the same qualities he admires in Vasko Popa:

> No poetry could carry less luggage than his, or be freer of predisposition and preconception. No poetry is more difficult to outflank, yet it is in no sense defensive. His poems are trying to find out what does exist, and what the conditions really are. The movement of his verse is part of his method of investigating something fearfully apprehended, fearfully discovered. But he will not be frightened into awe. He never loses his deeply ingrained humour and irony: that is his way of hanging on to his human wholeness.[120]

Hughes is talking about a poetry that can go anywhere and approach anything. It is imaginatively free, open to whatever it may encounter. Its underlying rationale is the search, which depends on the questioning consciousness retaining its scepticism. This is the poetry of Crow, working through the protagonist, Crow. Like a folk-tale creature Crow is synthesised from Nature and Art, so that naturalistic images and a traditional anthropomorphism co-exist as he "blinks", "spraddles head-down in the beach-garbage" or "flies guiltily off". Crow also has a plentiful and familiar stock of associations around him, which Hughes exploits and adds to with extraordinary inventiveness. Crow does not deny existing moralities and theologies: in "Crow Communes" a popularly

dormant aspect of Christianity (the magical eating of the god) is all the more strikingly revived because of Crow's appalled inability to deal with a whole range of religious experience. Similarly "Glimpse" brings back an aesthetic world closed to Crow himself. At such moments the poetry acknowledges as great a world against it as its own vast and unnatural[121] spirit-world, experience of which strengthens our "human wholeness" if we are open to its trials and conundrums.

The sequence Cave Birds, first broadcast on Radio 3 in June 1975, and published in a much revised version in 1978 without the narrative material between poems, uses some techniques similar to those of Crow. In the narrative material, Hughes himself told the story of his "hero" or "protagonist" who begins as a cockerel, goes through a series of changes and is re-born as a falcon. Like the other birds (ravens, crows and eagles), the protagonist is only nominally a bird: he is visualised as a kind of heraldic device, but his actions are human and allegoric. The naturalistic "crowish" base of the Crow poems, which greatly enriched the earlier book, is absent. Instead, Hughes has stressed the metaphysical problem:

> The hero's cockerel innocence, it turns out, becomes his guilt. His own self, finally, the innate nature of his flesh and blood, brings him to court.[122]

To Hughes the human condition is loaded with guilt: the shaman goes to get "a cure, an answer"[123] and "poetry is nothing if not that, the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error".[124] Consciousness of this error and its associated guilt, eating of the Tree of Knowledge, means beginning the search for redress. Though Hughes's own involvement with this guilt is historically grounded in reaction against Calvinism and scientific materialism, he sees guilt of some kind as inevitable. Unlike Lawrence, who actively sought an ideal society based on instinctual feelings,

Hughes, schooled in comparative social anthropology, is chiefly interested in particular solutions (in time and place) to recurrent questions of orientation. At present he seems entirely concerned with making poetic solutions and in the 1970's, up to the publication of Gaudete, Hughes (like Peter Brook) has especially favoured "workshop" activity. Cave Birds, Prometheus on his Crag and Orghast all initially received very restricted public exposure - on Radio 3, in a limited edition and at an Arts Festival in Iran, respectively, though the first two were published eventually. One's sense of this as essentially a workshop period increases when one considers Hughes's immense (and publicly unproductive) labour in creating out of our "common tonal consciousness"[125] the "audial, visceral, musical"[126] language of Orghast, which he has said was appropriate only in a dramatic or ritualistic context with its "body of precise but unexpressed meaning"[127] and specifically not (pace the sound poets), in poetry itself.

In Cave Birds this workshop element is plain. There is a certain doggedness about the way Hughes pursues his metaphysical question (though this is much less in evidence in the published version). The open plan and buried mythology of Crow, with its infinite possibilities for live connections, give way to an increasingly hedged and over-loaded narrative line:

> the physical life of the cockerel is offered
> up to the Creator, the Sun-Being who, in the
> aspect of judgement, is a raven.[128]

The formal, shamanistic commentary on the hero's guilt ("what has he failed to take account of ... what is he guilty of exactly? Being alive or of some error in the use of his life?"[129]) takes us, parable-fashion, through the hero's recognition that he has murdered his own demon, to his desire for understanding and atonement and finally to re-endorsement of the natural qualities of poise, control and harmony as

imaged in a new bird of prey which is nearer to Hopkins in its symbolism:

> In the wind-fondled crucible of his splendour
> The dirt becomes God.
>
> But when will he land
> On a man's wrist?[130]

These lines rise to the occasion, they state "the message" very beautifully, but as if to underwrite the dangers of so firm a conclusion to a piece of philosophical research, Hughes's goblin restores, in the book's concluding line, the enquiring, freely associative nature of many of the best pieces in the sequence:

> FINALE
>
> At the end of the ritual
> up comes a goblin.[131]

Elsewhere, the hero's recognition that he is "one gargantuan debt" comes across with bleak accuracy as our contemporary experience of guilt is unfolded. Endowed with ideas of goodness, man is conversely oppressed by his knowledge of history, represented here by the crimes of Herod, Rome, the Inquisition, Hitler and Stalin:

> this lunatic sum engrossed in your image
> ... presents ... a humbling weight that will
> not let you breathe.[132]

Caught by his own rationalism, man takes on responsibilities which were once the Devil's and he cannot carry them. Appeals to reason and knowledge and civilisation are discounted in actual experience:

> When I said: "Sanity and again Sanity and above all Sanity",
> He disembowelled himself with a cross-shaped cut.
> I stopped trying to say anything.[133]

Cave Birds, like "A Wind Flashes the Grass" and other Wodwo poems, puts this existentially in its realisation of the sickening indifference of the physical world:

> the leather of his shoes registered nothing
> and the silence of the furniture
> was the laughter of the gods.[134]

Throughout Hughes's work, frequently in Wodwo and Crow and especially in Prometheus on His Crag, this indifference is permanent:

> Minute after minute, aeon after aeon,
> Nothing lets up or develops. ("Pibroch")[135]

Hughes's way through follows on from the conclusions of his early nature poems. Harebell and Snowdrop[136] pursue their own ends implicitly, and:

> What humbles these hills has raised
> The arrogance of blood and bone,
> And thrown the hawk upon the wind,
> And lit the fox in the dripping ground.[137]
> ("Crow Hill")

Death comes inevitably, like the sudden collapse of a vacuum:

> The rat understands suddenly. It bows and is still,[138]
> With a little beseeching of blood on its nose-end.
> ("Song of a Rat" - Part 1, The Rat's Dance.)

The harmony and self-reliance Hughes finds in Nature is also discovered by Prometheus at the end of Prometheus on His Crag:

> And Prometheus eases free.
> He sways to his stature.
> And balances. And treads
>
> On the dusty peacock film where the world floats.[139]

Like Prometheus, the larks in "Skylarks" are harmonised with their symbolic suffering, so that the first version ends:

> But just before they plunge into the earth
>
> They flare and glide off low over grass, then up
> To land on a wall-top, crest up,
>
> Weightless,
> Paid-up,
> Alert,
>
> Conscience perfect.[140]

In neither case could one say that the full conditions of life are not met, yet Hughes is not dealing in sinister irrationalism or a mystical pseudo-religion of his own: he is, rather, meditating on his sense of a final harmony miraculously achieved.[141] He rejects the images of

supernatural strength he finds in St George (in "Gog" in Wodwo) and in Krogon/Pramanath (in Orghast), just as he rejects the attempts to destroy the Iron Man and the dragon in The Iron Man (1968). The satisfaction of these artistic endeavours is in their creation, through the experiences of shamanistic protagonists, of a sense of harmony and control out of the worst distress. In the same way, "Bride and Groom lie hidden for three days" in Cave Birds, which deals with male/female interdependency through the imagery of mechanical assembly, creates a beautiful sense of harmony out of a bald recognition of the origins of human relationships in self-interest and mutual need.[142]

In Hughes's recent publication, Gaudete (1977), there is a major development in the treatment of the protagonist. Hughes's mediating role of "literary shaman" is still carried out through the protagonist (here it is Nicholas Lumb, an Anglican clergyman), but now there is a coherent narrative structure which is reminiscent of both a novel and a film-script.[143] Also, there are no narrator's intrusions, as in the broadcast version of Cave Birds, while a rich naturalistic base, as in Crow, is restored. As Hughes used a kind of "counter-impulse" or "trickster" figure[144] in Crow, so in Gaudete he uses another"counter" figure, a changeling anti-priest whose story directly challenges our social and religious practices without dismissing them.

This avoidance of mere dismissal, of anarchy and blasphemy for their own sakes, is largely achieved through the shadowy re-emergence of a changed Rev Nicholas Lumb, whose fragmentary poems or "remains" (stylistically recalling Prometheus on His Crag) form the book's Epilogue. These stark poems, battening down their sensuous detail, speak from below experience, from "the bottom of all things": the tone is "utterly worn out utterly clear" (the second "Eskimo Song").[145] They share much with those short poems of Vasko Popa that Hughes found so difficult to outflank. Their eerie mood, coming from a drowned or invalided or severed consciousness,[146]

brings back a kind of cure from the spirit world. There is the musical beauty of poems like "I said goodbye to earth" and the meeting and partial relief of suffering through the ritualistic, funereal re-arrangement of feeling in "Waving goodbye, from your banked hospital bed" or "I know well". There is a tenderness and understanding of the physical world, that makes this Epilogue read like a sequence of love poems, while at the same time the poems' philosophical harmony immediately relates them to Eliot's Four Quartets. It is an extraordinary feat of imagination to encompass both aspects of Lumb's humanity, for Gaudete is still pursuing the theme of the schizophrenia of modern man, in the two parts of the book. Though the experience of the original Lumb in the spirit world is largely hidden from us as we read about the changeling Lumb, we know it is intimately related to the events on earth (the relationship is overt on one occasion - in one of the sections entitled "Lumb", pp 77-83, when changeling and double wrestle in the river) and in the Epilogue those events are mysteriously echoed and the harmony between the two halves of Lumb is established. Musical harmony, in fact, is Hughes's first reference point in both the line by line texture of poems ("I turn every combatant into a bit of music, then resolve the whole uproar into as formal and balanced a figure of melody and rhythm as I can. When all the words are hearing each other clearly, and every stress is feeling every other stress, and all are contented - the poem is finished"[147]), and in the overall composition and structure of works of literature. His description of the end of The Iron Man is typical of his view that the poet or story-teller, like Littleblood singing in his ear at the end of Crow, must offer a fully aware mediation that allows us to hear the music of the spheres from our place on an earth which "is so huge, so hard, wild/ And so nearly nothing".[148] The Iron Man finally commands the defeated dragon "who is now his slave, like a djin or demon, in the old-fashioned style, to fly around the earth making the music of space. The music

of space penetrates all the people of the earth and the universal harmony alters their nature and regulates their being".[149]

The longer, first part of Gaudete is built on the shamanistic idea of the priest going to the spirit world to get "something badly needed" in his community. The social and religious reassessment that the action entails, involving the sacrifice of Lumb, is itself the cure. The changeling interprets Christian "love" literally - he forms the women of the parish into a coven through which he will father the Messiah. We should not, however, read the subsequent events as advocating some kind of new fertility sect. Certainly many aspects of the village's collective morality are high-lighted, but the monstrous growth of Lumb's sect (he has similar psychological origins to King Kong and with his anarchic strength and sexual potency he too operates as a culture-hero) is Hughes's stalking-horse. Hughes's metaphysical thought actually emerges in our consideration of the corruption that the changeling Lumb stirs up, as well as from the Epilogue: plainly our present society denies irrepressible energies and any re-opening of negotiations will be painful and difficult.

The most important aspect of Gaudete here is that it returns Hughes convincingly to the tradition of nature and rural poetry as metaphysical enquiry. In Lumb we see man as part of nature. The binding of Lumb to a tree-trunk and the exchange of spirits that takes place when their bodies are flogged into one being[150] is accompanied by an alteration in Lumb's consciousness. His double, like Crow, is morally innocent and his sect appears to be instinctively formed from fragments of ancient religions based on animism and nature worship. Just before his death, when his strength is actually sapped, Lumb's double "imagines he is effortless Adam, before weariness entered, leaping for God".[151] This ideal "pre-consciousness" unity with nature is also couched in Hughes's

familiar terms of "the elemental power circuit of the universe":

He has plugged his energy appeal into the inexhaustible earth.[152]

Throughout the book binoculars, telescopes, rifles, shot-guns, pistols, knives, whips, pitch-forks, etc., have characterised Lumb as a hunted creature while he has appeared in association with sacrificial bulls and slaughtered cattle, with his familiar creature the otter[153] and with the hunted stag whose death Maud forsees and whose antlers and "russet bristly pelt" Lumb wears "flapping at his naked back" in the ritual. But Lumb is a dual figure who is finally "found out" by both the natural and the human world. In the Epilogue he is seen as "half crazy"[154], a mediator whom neither side can accommodate, and in the "Lumb" section on pp 49-53 some of Hughes's major philosophical concerns, including the subject/object duality, are crucially explored. First,

> Lumb
> Is looking at the land.
> This is the unalterably strange earth.[155]

Then, twenty lines later, like Wordsworth grasping at a wall or tree to recall himself to reality[156]:

He breathes deeply and strongly to confirm his solidity.

Personal consciousness leads to the heresy of philosophical separation: he "tries to imagine simple freedom". (In social terms this involves "running away" with one of the women, Felicity.) At the same time he sees multiple realities* "as each person carries the whole world, like a halo". There are "millions of yet other, alternative worlds", but Lumb himself is anchored perforce: there still "stands the tree/Of what he cannot alter". The section ends with premonitions of fiery destruction and then with Lumb's Gethsemane:

> He sinks his prayer into the strong tree and
> the tree stands as his prayer.[157]

* See p 284 above.

In the final chase, he is fully identified with nature as he is hunted, shot and then viewed by his pursuers who are "like sightseers around the maneater's long body" and who carry him back "strung under a fence rail".[158] This man-hunt is the converse of "Moon Man-Hunt" in The Earth-Owl and Other Moon People (1963) or, more seriously, the man-hunts in the Wodwo stories, for Lumb's experience in the hunt is of an increasing re-integration with nature, culminating in fatal moments of harmonious stillness - just before Lumb's death Westlake gets the first shot at him as he pauses by a waterhen's nest:

> Lumb looks down at the freckled brown earthenware of the family of eggs, on the clump of decay.[159]

And, finally, giving time for Hagen's Mannlicher to be levelled at him, Lumb stands poised for a moment "in the oily fringe of lilies" as a truck approaches:

> He hears around it the whole cooling world, hung like a glass bell, Simmering with evening birds.[160]

Lumb may be monstrously impossible in the human world, but the "nature tragedy" of his tearing apart is a moving and profound development of nature used as metaphysical enquiry.

As with Hughes's earlier nature poetry, the most successful parts of Gaudete are those that deal with the actual feel of things and the processes of life. The energy and vitality of the hunt at the end of Gaudete depends on a mastery of physical detail and pace and narrative. Its sixteen odd pages form a single hypnotising "span". The book has a number of such controlled "spans" in which an extended process is enacted. The structure of "Skylarks" now appears as a blue-print for these "spans", in the best of which there is an imaginative intensity that becomes cinematic; Genet or Bergman seem to have directed parts of these scenes (the first section of the "Prologue" of pages 101-106) while the cattle sections (the second part of the "Prologue" and pages

98-101) are Hughes at his best. As in "Sheep" or "A March Calf" in Season Songs (1976) there is focussed observation, unsentimental pity and a direct but mysterious transfer of feeling into a human register. In the Gaudete pieces there are the additional dimensions that the whole surrounding structure of the book provides. These slaughter-house and cattle-yard scenes jolt the metaphysical experience of Gaudete into our own day: there is a collective, mechanical brutality in the electrified clubs, the inhuman clangour of steel doors and roaring beasts, the bloody capes and the men's bodies "deformed by oilskins". The industrial slaughter-house is barbarous: it confuses responsibilities and drafts men into a sickening involvement with nightmare. The cattle-yard with its "raw, high lamp" and muddy, crowded misery seems backed by war memories, shallowly-buried. Both scenes ring with "infernal laughter". Lumb, like so many of Hughes's protagonists before him, is victimised in a living nightmare: "he shouts to the men" but his voice is over-powered "in the grievous uproar of the animals ... What has he done and what do they want?"[161] Hughes's sensitivity to contemporary experience, to its disorientation and moral vacuum, has flared into animal images that proclaim their social connections with unequalled force.

In a gentler tone, the "Epilogue" (pp 173-175) begins with a perfect religious parable. (Hughes is master of the short prose tale, as the stories in How the Whale Became (1963) demonstrate.) The telling of the parable answers its own riddle: how can you show that a man whistling an otter out of a lough is a greater miracle than the whole creation and God himself? Hughes relates the incident as it happened for the first time for three children - the whistle "like a fine bloody thread being pulled through their hearts" and the beast that they have never seen before coming "up the gravelly beach below the rocks with that merry, hump-backed, snake-headed gallop of weasels" until it is there, close to them with "its foreign eyes, its wide whiskers". The priest's

response to the girls' story is to speak of "this great, shining beauty that God whistled up out of the waters of chaos". He is hypnotised by his own language ("more and more glorious" and "greater and more extraordinary beauties"), but "the girls became dull, and the moment his words paused they vanished through the doorway". If Gaudete (Rejoice!) was written as a metaphysical work, then for Hughes there are spiritual needs unmet by the Church's theology. To have a rhetoric separated from "felt experience" is to have no language with which to negotiate with "whatever powers there are". For this priest there are no channels of feeling open (there is no "inner life") and there is no possibility of relationship with the creation. As I have stressed, Lumb, no more than King Kong can solve our present maladjustments to nature and the environment, or our social confusions about sex and individuality and moral meaning. He is a fiction: at most he can alter our imaginative outlook, our perception of the colours and energies among which we live; at least he can prompt questions about our linguistic and social configurations of experience. In the tale, seeing the creature whistled from the lough was somehow more true than the whole of received theological and scientific knowledge. Poetry can specify experience in that way and so make its own oblique but powerful metaphysical statements.

I have been implying that the poetry discussed so far is immersed in the religious and philosophical problems of our daily experience and that its poetic treatment of these problems extends our "structure of feeling". The grounds for these assumptions are literary-critical: if one can show how a complex of received material (from, for example, rites performed in animal skins to the experience of dissociation when something is "behind the nearly unbreakable screen glass of a television/ With the sound turned off"[162]) is brought into tension in a poem, then one is exploring actual cultural connections and relationships. The extent to which these connections and relationships are clarified and

penetrated, rather than assumed, depends on the quality of the structure of feeling. I have indicated some aspects of the part of nature in the structure of feeling in Gaudete, but there is also a specific rural community which is Lumb's sphere of action and which is quite clearly, socially and geographically, far from the main concerns of our society. From one point of view there is no difficulty, as these concerns are actually very near to the interests of the minority that might read Hughes, but if more subtle questions are to be claimed for Gaudete, we must see how Hughes handles the values and associations that have gathered, particularly in the last seventy years, around his material.

At the level of a Henry Williamson story or a Masefield narrative poem, Gaudete is an absorbing book. This is structurally important and the book's many other complex images of hunting and suffering preserve its subtleties of tone. Nevertheless, the world of Gaudete is only grudgingly post-Imperialist. It is a countryside of stud-farms, park-land, plantations of conifers, rivers, country inns and large houses. The people are familiar types - retired military, cunning poacher, farmer's wife, country doctor, etc. The substances and colours are mostly rich and traditional - mahogany, walnut, copper, cut-glass door knobs, expensive enamels, fine gun-metal. Hughes has chosen, however much one still comes across it, a mythical old England. The "city" of eight miles away is a cathedral town out of Hardy. Garten cycles there to the nearest chemist's; there is a gun-shop too. The "country" is either immemorially unchangeable:

> The parkland unrolls, lush with the
> full ripeness of the last week in
> May, under the wet midmorning light.
> The newly plumped grass shivers and
> flees. Giant wheels of light ride
> into the chestnuts, and the poplars
> lift and pour like the tails of
> horses. Distance blues beyond distance.[163]

Or, in the heat and "over-richness" of scent that Dr Westlake steps out into from the roadhouse, it seems located in Edward Thomas's England:

> He stares at the piled hairy flowers,
> hedgerow beyond draped hedgerow. Hushed
> and claustrophobic. He imagines the still
> Sargasso of it, rising and falling,
> right across England.[164]

Yet however seductive the furnishings, the feeling, as in Pinter's drawing-rooms or Bunuel's bourgeois luxury, is constantly counter-pastoral. This is a beautiful waste land, in which marriages are stale and sexuality is repressed and voyeuristic. A keen expression of this decay is on pages 41-46. Sexuality in Commander Estridge's house ("his dream of beautiful daughters/Has become a reality .... unmanageable and frightening"[165]) is madly forced into the most "civilised" kind of music:

> The scherzo
> Of Beethoven's piano sonata Opus 109
> Is devouring itself, dragonish ....[166]

The motif is sustained:

> But still the enraged
> Albeit ephemeral music goes on
> Like a materialised demon
> Vandalising the ponderous ill-illumined Victorian house[167]

Until, at the moment of the elder daughter's suicide, either because of her pregnancy or because of Lumb's preference for her sister,

> ... the music elbows nakedly in through the broken
> glass with the wet stirred freshness of the garden trees.[168]

There is no place for sexuality in Estridge's life, just as for Hughes there has never been a place in Protestantism for the female deity. It is into such vacuums that Lumb's sexuality storms, with its crude goddess, "an archaic stone carving ... with a stricken expression"[169].

The structure of feeling, in fact, turns out to be adequate to the theme: denial of sexual being is associated with denial of the inner life and destruction of the outer. This "rural England" now seems far from neo-Georgianism without being an easy anti-Georgianism.

In Gaudete Hughes is able to explore and manipulate feelings that once

he only felt able to bluffly endorse. The characterisation of Major Hagen shows how far he has come from "The Retired Colonel" or "The Ancient Heroes" of Lupercal and The Hawk in the Rain. He is still fascinated by the military character which he depicts with deliberate humour and admiration. He revels in his exaggerations: the face has "paradeground gravel in the folded gnarl of his jowls" and is "drained of the vanities, pickled in mess-alcohol and smoked dark"[170].

Membership of the warrior caste is as firmly written in Hagen's name as in his features:

> And the underlip, so coarsely wreathed
> And undershot, like the rim of a crude archaic piece of
> earthenware
>
> Is not moved
> Forty generations from the freezing salt and the
> longships.

But this is only the beginning. Hagen is precise and inflexible, almost inhuman:

> A nerve is flickering
> Under the exemplary scraped steel hair on the bleak skull,[171]

His response to his young wife's infidelity is manic; for his kind history has turned into a blind alley:

> There is so much he must not fail.
> Humiliation of Empire, a heraldic obligation
> Must have its far-booming say.
> Three parts incomprehensible. [172]

The comfort of weapons, the "lonely masterful elation" they bring, replaces other human contact. The Mannlicher is Hagen's "first love":

> Germanic precision, slender goddess
> Of Hagen's devotions
> And the unfailing bride
> Of his ecstasies in the primal paradise, and the
> midwife of Eden's beasts,
> Painlessly delivered, with a little blood,
> And laid at his feet
> As if fresh from the Creator's furnace, as if
> to be named.
> With her, only with her
> Hagen feels his life stir on its root.[173]

One may jib at "Germanic precision", if not at the whole equation of Major Hagen, and the same charge of predictability and stereotyping could be made against other characters: but resisting this, is the book's total effect, its success in transforming English rural life into a "changeling version" of itself. This, in spite of the lapses, gives a dominant mood to the book which is clearly related to the reasons for Lumb's shamanistic adventure: in Gaudete social practice has cemented over vital sources of energy and finally it is the village's collective response to Lumb that is imaginatively disturbing - and imaginatively curative. It is also worth remembering, should it be objected that, as subject-matter, English rural life is now of marginal significance, that in cultural terms, its values and meanings continue to be extremely powerful in our society.

The admittedly varied quality of Gaudete is plain in the section where Dunworth finds his wife with Lumb (pp 84-88): the style is popular and racy, at times even as merely professionally efficient as Ian Fleming or Denis Wheatley, so that one almost overlooks the quality of the writing in the long, stony moment when Lumb, Dunworth and his wife confront each other. This section's conclusion is expected and the impression lingers that the writing is somehow impure and brutal, but the narrative control and descriptive precision ("His pale-eyed stare is brittle and impotently severe, like the stare of a lizard ...[174]) and the placing of the incident in the total pattern of the book, overcome one's fastidious reservations. This could not be claimed for the whole of Gaudete: the film-script short-hand sometimes results in derivative and approximate language, as in this passage where the blacksmith Evans attacks his wife:

> Evans' first blow crushes her lip, jolts her hair
> into a fine dark veil,
> And fixes her in the corner by the fireplace
> With angled limbs. She rearranges her slight, small body
> Tentatively erect. His questions

Are travelling too fast, and they are not stopping
For her to answer. His second blow
Carries her into the fireplace
From which he snatches her back, as if concerned,
As if to safety,
Now his arm rises and falls, and she bows
beneath it.
Garten watches like one whose turn comes next,
Marvelling
At what a body can take.[175]

In contrast, the passage describing the de-horning of Holroyd's bull finds its own language. Unlike the slangy, careless toughness of the Evans piece, the pain here is rooted in the core of the book:

> The animal's uplooking eye squirms like
> a live eye in a pan. It emits a
> yodelling weird roar, like a steel roof
> being ripped by a power saw, as[176]
> the wire bites.

In this final section on Ted Hughes, I want to suggest the contemporary appropriateness of his poetic method. In his use of nature, Hughes has continued a traditional function of poetry - to redefine our sense of metaphysical values in the light of changing social reality. His nature poems are suggestive meditations which affirm inalienable differences, but which also unobtrusively bring those differences into relationship with present perceptions of the world.[177] These poems are characterised by a width of reference that easily accommodates both traditional literary configurations and the changed conditions of the present: in the best of them an abundance of response is brought into focus by the poet's concentration on "the hopeful religion" of his subject and that subject's endeavour "to find himself himself".[178] "Gnat-Psalm", from Wodwo, is typical. Like all things, the gnats have their own secret which we see as their particular identity and strength. Hughes characterises this strength by imaginatively relating a complex of images (from the colloquial "Writing on the air, rubbing out everything they write" to "... they are the nails/In the dancing hands and feet of the Gnat-god").[179]

What gives such poems their freshness is Hughes's lack of pre-judgement, his resolve to let the exploration take its course, "to accept the energy"[180] and trust that art, the poem itself, will interpret and control that energy. Like Blake's Tiger, "the symbol itself is unqualified, it is an irruption"[181]. Theologically, Hughes's experience of God, like that of Pilinszky whom he has translated, may be quite comfortless, "But this God has the one Almightiness that matters: He is the Truth".[182]

This integrity has given ample ammunition to Hughes's detractors. According to David Holbrook, it is nihilism, reductionism and the refusal of moral meaning and growth rather than integrity. Holbrook thinks there is nothing negative or threatening for a writer to explore:

> Today, there is no authentic reason in science or philosophy, to see the world as an unintelligible and alien cosmos, in which man is not at home ... [183]

For Hughes, harmony and control and optimism are only meaningfully created in the midst of all the real conditions of life, just as Christianity requires the Crucifixion to authenticate its communications to men. Hughes's whole poetic effort is concerned with man's struggle "truly to possess his own experience, in other words to regain his genuine self".[184] That desire to regain the genuine self is a way of describing the restless condition of consciousness which for Hughes means constant negotiation with "his idea of the Creator". This negotiation is an undogmatic, critical activity and a poem like "Crow Goes Hunting"[185], for example, is typical of its provisional, exploratory achievements. Hughes's manufacture of his own mythology, including his own form of literary shamanism, is obviously nothing new in poetry but it does not seem coincidental that its appearance and the way in which its purpose became clear in the 1970s, has been matched by a similarly bold theological attempt (as seen, for example, in The Myth of God Incarnate*)

* See above p 231 ff.

to regain for man "his genuine self". This has nothing to do with the cult of individualism, in the sense of West Coast self-discovery and self-fulfilment: even critics who missed the alienating and objectifying tenor of Crow must surely recognise the force of social analysis in Gaudete.

To philosophy and religion, poetry is a kind of mis-rule. Its actions are telling, but it remains symbolic and usually it does not offer a fully coherent programme. Instead, it can question and re-phrase and stimulate. Hughes's distinction as a poet of nature lies in his appreciation of the metaphysical significance and potential of nature, when treated in poetry with an awareness of social and scientific change. He is not against the scientific, or any other particular mode of thought, until he sees partial truths being elevated into a total explanation of experience. In a recent poem, Hughes tells of a man who, when he "met the full burning moon/Rolling slowly towards him", stabbed it until it shrank to

> ... a silk handkerchief, torn,
> And wet as with tears.
> The person picked it up. He walked on
> Into moonless night
> Carrying this strange trophy.[186]

Without nostalgia or sentimentality, Hughes's poetry faces us with our own journey towards moonless night.

CONCLUSION

(i) The survival of nature and rural poetry

> In this actual world there is then not much point in counter-posing or restating the great abstractions of Man and Nature. We have mixed our labour with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and separate either out.
> . . . . . .
> Out of the ways in which we have interacted with the physical world we have made not only human nature and an altered natural order; we have also made societies.[1]
>
> Raymond Williams

In examining Twentieth Century British poetry of the natural and rural world, I have never sought to oppose the "natural" to the "human". The poetry of nature, throughout this thesis, has always been partly talking about humanity.

It is also clear that the whole case for a nature poetry of metaphysical enquiry depends on direct human involvement in imaginative analogues. In the "unorthodox" enquiry of Lawrence and Hughes, where God is the "creative urge", "the Creation" or the principle of life itself , it is easy to see how organically these analogues work. Much criticism of Ted Hughes, in fact, is mistakenly based on the idea that he <u>compares</u> human situations to natural ones and so undermines civilization and morality. There is no such polarity in Hughes; he is dealing with common energies and the force of his poetry depends on recognising their reality rather than on censuring or judging them. Nature poets of a more "orthodox" kind of metaphysical enquiry, like Hopkins and R S Thomas, feel the pressure to explain rather than negotiate and this orthodoxy finally comes into conflict with other principles - firstly, in Hughes's terms, following poetry wherever it may lead, and secondly, dealing with nature as ontologically autonomous. To Lawrence this is "otherness", the inalienable difference and natural rights of all creatures, to MacDiarmid it is the inscrutable mystery at the core of things and to Hughes it is the idea of separate lives, pursuing their

own ends, quite beyond the limits of our consciousness or our science. It is consistent with these claims for the nature poetry of unorthodox metaphysical enquiry, to see Hopkins and R S Thomas as great devotional poets. The essence of devotional poetry is in some way to square the known ends of belief with the stress of concrete experience;and here, the comparisons and explanations and over-determination of the orthodox metaphysical enquiry of Hopkins and R S Thomas, turn from restrictions into assets.

If this idea of "metaphysical enquiry" is one way of claiming importance for contemporary nature and rural poetry, a second way, though artistically somewhat negative, is more objectively demonstrable. The apparently peripheral concerns of the countryside, and the way it is presented to us, can now be actually seen to be an important source of social and cultural meaning: particular structures of feeling in Georgian poetry, for example, which defined and endorsed aspects of the dominant culture of the day, may be recognised now in every other television commercial. In contemporary neo-Georgian poetry of "the underground", by contrast, a section of the subordinate culture receives support through the transformation of such values and social experience. Modern mass communication industries now offer frank, confirmatory images of, and statements about, major political and cultural values, which are, and have been for several centuries, involved in the supposedly "irrelevant" regions of nature and the countryside.

(ii) <u>Humanity as part of nature</u>

> ... modern poetry proves conclusively that our kinship with organic nature can only be repressed, never eradicated. The more it is repressed, the greater its threat to the civilisation that represses it.[2]
>
> Michael Hamburger

At another level, but still stressing humanity as a part of nature, much of the poetry in this thesis returns our attention to the limitations and "permanent" biological characteristics of humanity's natural being. This reminder detonates several lines of enquiry: first, D H Lawrence's "abyss of self-knowledge" and hatred of the mechanical, Jung's idea of the sickness of over-developed consciousness and Ted Hughes's censure of scientific and rationalistic hubris, are part of a long-standing pattern of reaction against what are seen as repressive developments in science, technology and morality - only now, in the era of limits to growth, economic pessimism and ecology, are those who disclaim those developments beginning to be viewed as belonging to the vanguard. Second, Marxism is showing a rapidly growing interest in the "base of the base" - whether in the French challenge to Althusser with its renewed emphasis on psychoanalysis, or in the biological Marxism of Sebastiano Timpanaro. Nature poetry may soon be seen less as universalising reaction, maintaining the status quo by covert reference to "innate" characteristics, and more as a mode of self-discovery, an aid to progressive change. More significantly still, in view of the dismay with which we must view the record of so many socialist leaders from Stalin to Pol Pot, we may have opportunities to discount the inhumanity of coercion and re-discover the fundamental socialist idea that all people should have the opportunity to creatively fulfil themselves. From Wordsworth to Lawrence and Hughes, either directly or by analogy, nature poetry has stressed the individuality and the reserves of creativity in all people. Wordsworth unblocked channels of feeling and restored individual life and resistance to his social outcasts, Hopkins longed for "selfbeing", Lawrence wanted all things to "blossom into being" and Hughes has sought to regain for us our "genuine self". For too long, it has been customary to read these vital perceptions as mere "bourgeois individualism".

(iii) <u>The creation of poetic meaning out of mass meaning</u>

..... we write only by being written ....[3]
Derrida.

Established structures of feeling and modes of perception exert tremendous pressure on writers, who may be "written" almost completely by their culture: critical hindsight can demonstrate the presence of "naked ideology" in works that seemed fresh and contemporary on first appearance. My account of the British tradition of nature and rural poetry, a tradition which has been especially vulnerable to cultural imperialism, emphasises the danger that this poetry will be "written" in similar fashion. This can be seen in the striking way that conventions appear to corrupt and pre-determine nature and rural poetry. The clearest example is pastoral, though post-Romantic poetry could also be cited. The solution is not to abolish particular forms, as Eagleton would abolish myth and Dunn would abolish nature poetry, or, like Williams, to make the crucial work the judging of conventions themselves: on the contrary, literary forms and conventions must be used for new ends, in the way, for example, that Robert Frost and Dylan Thomas made use of pastoral.

Similarly, in looking at Edward Thomas and D H Lawrence, we can observe writers who move on (from being passive subjects of restricted, current structures of feeling) to become creators of new and fertile structures of feeling. In contemporary rural and nature poetry, there are two major lines of resistance to the problem of "being written": Basil Bunting and Geoffrey Hill have devised modernistic forms through which to synthesise new kinds of meaning and Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes have worked through and beyond their cultural milieux. Heaney, always aware of the dangers, has chosen, in his most recent poetry, to move away from the language and mythology of nature, while Hughes has advanced from blunt encounters with the stereotyped figures and language

of his early reading and experience, to the sophisticated excellence of Gaudete, in which he turns traditional English structures of feeling and popular cultural forms into the service of a highly accomplished poetry of metaphysical enquiry.

(iv) Attitudes to Change and Critical Methodology

> I modernise the anachronism (4)
> * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * R. S. Thomas

> Mystery envelopes the operation of the technological "alchemists". Deterrence has become normal and minds have been habituated to the vocabulary of mutual extermination. And within this normality, hideous cultural abnormalities have been nurtured and are growing to full girth. (5)
>
> E. P. Thompson

In my critical discussion of authors and poems, I have tried to test out the usefulness of the notion of "sensitivity to change". Not unexpectedly, merely overt or fashionable inclusion of contemporary detail is seen to be beside the point, but in many instances such sensitivity contributes markedly to the success of the writing, as, for example, in Edward Thomas's "As the Team's Head Brass", Hughes's Crow and Gaudete, Heaney's natural imagery of Ireland used for political commentary, Hill's Mercian Hymns or the use of technical and scientific imagery in MacDiarmid or R. S. Thomas. It is always, however, a question of judging what use of sensitivity to change a poet has made; where there is no such sensitivity or even deliberate exclusion of it, the writing should have other clear objectives or should be aware of its own position. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" succeeds, for example, because Yeats counts on, and self-consciously uses, the island's unreality, while the poems of a Monro or Drinkwater fail because they mistake ideological day-dreaming for reality.

In claiming that "sensitivity to change" should be used in criticism in an ad hoc manner, and in asking for its usefulness to be

judged by reference to the resulting criticism itself, I may appear to be adopting an over-cautious and equivocal stance: but behind this is the recognition that literature deals more often in exceptions than in pre-requisites and pre-conditions. In practice, caution seems unnecessary and I would claim, as a matter of observation, that sensitivity to change and the effective imaginative use of it is very much a feature of the best contemporary poetry of the natural and rural world. In MacDiarmid, Bunting , Heaney and Hill, the soil itself has a political colour, while the whole of Hughes's work is a visionary response to the social and cultural experience of his age.

Hitherto, Hughes, a "devout materialist" like MacDiarmid, has mostly presented his response in transposed or symbolic terms, but in his most recent books, Moortown (1979) and Remains of Elmet (1979), he emphasises social and historical experience as it emerges from the natural and biological base. The land is seen now as "heavy with the dream of a people "[6] and in the wry poem "Sunstruck" (in which great energies, almost in self-parody , find their metaphor in a game of cricket) Hughes describes "the brassy sycamores", "the wage-mirage sparkle of mills" and "the black slot of home".[7] In Moortown, though he can still write the narrative of energy (as the fine sequence "Adam and the Sacred Nine" shows), it is in the rural working poems (collected here as the first section, "Moortown"), that the force of this new emphasis in his work is most apparent. As in Robert Frost, there is no "literary ego", no hint of Georgian poetic attitudes playing at work and belonging: Hughes leaves no gap between the rich specificity of the poem and its persona. I would suggest that this shift in Hughes towards a more overtly "culture-connected" kind of nature and rural poetry, is in line with general developments in British poetry and its milieu since the 1960's. It is striking, in fact, how closely Hughes, and other

poets I have been considering, track movements and feelings within this milieu. The strong sense of natural cycle in Remains of Elmet, for example, is over-shadowed, as Crow was often over-shadowed, by Thompson's "technological alchemy" - the possibility of cataclysm and termination. The book's final poem describes "an angel made of smoking snow", a terror "cast in burning metal":

> In my dream I saw something disastrous.
>
> The full moon had crashed onto Halifax.
> Black Halifax boiled in phosphorus.
> Halifax was an erupting crater.
>
> The flames seemed to labour. Then a tolling glare
> Heaved itself out and writhed upwards -
> And it was a swan the size of a city! 8

We need politically committed poetry and we need "problem-solving" poetry, in Donald Davie's sense, but at the beginning of the 1980's it is also clear that we need the mythical and imaginative dimensions of Ted Hughes. He, more than any other contemporary poet, has shown that nature and rural poetry can, and should, be about humanity's central concerns and dilemmas.

Finally, I would argue that literary criticism badly needs to develop and relate two qualities that have all too often been placed in simple and damaging opposition: personal insight, judgement and critical commitment, on the one hand, and the use of extrinsic material, with its attention to knowledge and context and objectivity, on the other. Each is subject to its own dangers, subjective ahistoricism and the fallacy of scientific totality and objectivity respectively, but neither can be neglected. If I am enthusiastic about the work of Raymond Williams, it is because of his full and continuing response to the complexity of this issue.[9] It would be hasty to conclude that this is a convenient liberal

compromise. M. D. Shipman, discussing the "value-free myth" in Social Science, indicates that Williams's position on the maintenance of both objectivity and insight is part of more widespread general developments:

> This is not an attack on the ideal of objectivity. This is still at the heart of science. It is an attack on the adoption of the form of objectivity without consideration of its purpose. The danger is that the motions of scientific activity are gone through for their own sake. Insight and understanding of crucial social issues take second place. 10

APPENDIX : VULGAR MARXISM

We do not often hear, now, the traditional anti-Marxist charge of "reflectionism", "naive determinism", "reductionism", "vulgar Marxism" (all terms to denote the theory of direct causal correspondences between features of the economic base and the cultural superstructure), though one should remember that the severest criticisms of texts as far apart as Christopher Caudwell's Illusion and Reality (1938) and Lucien Goldmann's The Hidden God (1964) and Towards a Sociology of the Novel (1975) have been made on these grounds. It is also salutary, in beginning a study dealing with the connexions between literature and society, to recall the main features of vulgar Marxism in criticism.

Marx and Engels, of course, were not faced with the post-revolutionary problem of overhauling their aesthetics: Peter Demetz, Marx, Engels and the Poets (Chicago, 1967) p.153, contrasts the crudities of critics like Donald Morrow (Where Shakespeare Stood, Milwaukee, 1935, p.15) - "any play (Shakespeare) wrote was a blow against feudal aspirations" - with the lack of specific references to economic determinism in the arts, in the scattered critical writings of Marx and Engels themselves:

> Basically they both were rooted so deeply in the German Shakespearean tradition that it never occurred to them for a moment to motivate their personal enthusiasm, shared with whole generations of German writers, with political or economic arguments. (Demetz, p.153.)

As dialectical materialism looked increasingly for a complete account of art, these gaps in Marxist theory became crucial. The solution of Plekhanov (1857-1918) was to admit the deficiency and turn to Kant for the notion of an innate aesthetic sense:

for Lenin, the solution was an unashamedly partisan role for party literature.

> Down with unpartisan littérateurs! Down with the supermen of literature! Literature must become a part of the general cause of the proletariat, "a small cog and a small screw" in the social-democratic mechanism, one and indivisible ...
> (Quoted by Steiner, Language and Silence, (1967), p.335. The words are from an essay published in Novaia Jizn in November, 1905.)

But the most significant point to emerge from the comments on literature of Marx (particularly in the less dogmatic writings before 1845) and Engels (particularly in his late correspondence) is their acceptance of the oblique relationship of literature to society. The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, for example, allow great autonomy for literature as do Engels's famous letters to Minna Kautsky in November 1885 and Margaret Harkness in April 1888. In the first of these, the thesis of a work may arise "from the situation and action itself, without being explicitly displayed", while in the second, Engels goes further:

> The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art.
> See Marx/Engels on Literature and Art, ed. Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (1973), p.116 ff.

René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (1949) 3rd revised ed. 1966, pp 287-288 note three other important letters: Engels to Starkenburg, 25 January 1894, to Joseph Bloch, 21 September 1890 and to Mehring, 14 July 1893. Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, The Sociology of Literature (1972), reviewing Marxist theories of literature, refer in Chapter II to the fact that both Marx and Engels allowed full scope for individual artistic genius, Marx arguing, in his Preface to the Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy (1857) for the "unequal relationship of the development of material production ...to artistic production", and Engels, in Über Kunst

und Literatur, ed. M Lifschitz (Berlin, 1948), claiming that the novel's point should emerge from the skill of the depiction and not from overt political tendency - so a conservative like Balzac can actually expose bourgeois illusions, as Lukács argues in Studies in European Realism. Lukacs claims "that the 'inexorable veracity' of Balzac's art drives him to transcend his reactionary ideology and perceive the real issues at stake" - Eagleton's summary, Criticism and Ideology, p.69. Eagleton goes on to criticise this as a simplistic notion, for "the real is by necessity empirically imperceptible" in the capitalist mode of production. For a more extended discussion of this matter, see Chapter 3 of Terry Eagleton's short guide Marxism and Literary Criticism (1976).

FOOTNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1 Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W H Gardner (1953), p 39.

2 "The serious writer of verse must be prepared to cross himself with the best verse of other languages and the best prose of all languages. In Georgian poetry there is almost no crossing visible; it is inbred. It has developed a technique and a set of emotions all of its own ... What nearly all the writers have in common is the quality of pleasantness. There are two varieties of pleasantness: (1) The insidiously didactic, or Wordsworthian (a rainbow and a cuckoo's song); (2) the decorative, playful or solemn, minor-Keatsian, too happy, happy brook, or lucent sirops. In either variety the Georgians caress everything they touch .." "Apteryx" (pseudonym of T S Eliot), "Verse Pleasant and Unpleasant", review of Georgian Poetry, 1916-1917, The Egoist, V, 3, March 1918, p 43. See John Press, A Map of Modern English Verse (Oxford, 1969). Reprinted with corrections, 1971, p 118.

3 T S Eliot, Selected Poems (1954).

4 This word also suggests the story of Tereus, Philomela "so rudely forc'd" (the swallow, who could only twitter) and Procne (the nightingale), a story of clear relevance to the encounter between the typist and the house agent's clerk, which follows.

5 Malcolm Bradbury, The Social Context of Modern English Literature, (Oxford, 1971) p 130, mentions some studies of earlier periods concerned with "the practical features of the literary career": E H Miller, The Professional Writer in Elizabethan England (Cambridge, Mass, 1959); A S Collins, Authorship in the Days of Johnson (1927) and The Profession of Letters: 1780-1832 (1928); Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957); Richard D Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public: 1800-1900 (Chicago, 1957); J W Saunders, The Profession of English Letters (London/Toronto, 1964). Two works behind Bradbury's own sociological observations (see Chapter V, "Who our Writers Are") are Robert Escarpit, Sociology of Literature, trans Ernest Pick (1965) in which the emergence of the "literary milieu", a concentration "around the middle zone of the social

scale" (p 37) is traced and Raymond Williams's The Long Revolution (1961) which includes an examination of some sociological aspects of 350 English writers born between 1470 and 1920 (see Chapter V, Pelican ed, 1965, pp 254-270). After Bradbury's book, A Laurenson and A Swingewood published their The Sociology of Literature (1972).

6 Bradbury, Social Context, pp 139-140.

7 George Orwell, writing in 1940, made a number of confident assumptions about such matters in his account of the Georgian poets and their readers: "War poems apart, English verse of the 1910-25 period is mostly 'country'. The reason no doubt was that the rentier-professional class was ceasing once and for all to have any real relationship with the soil; but at any rate there prevailed then, far more than now, a kind of snobbism of belonging to the country and despising the town". "Inside the Whale", Inside the Whale and Other Essays (1962), p 21, ed reprinted from Selected Essays (1957).

8 Marx's phrase in "Theses on Feuerbach". See Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed: D McLellan (Oxford, 1977), p 156.

9 "Metacriticism" (Allan Rodway, "Generic Criticism", Contemporary Criticism, ed: Bradbury and Palmer (1970), uses the term opposite "intrinsic criticism", which is formalistic) - whether biographical, historical, philosophical, psychological, etc - only attempts to be illuminative and does not try to give the kind of complete account of a writer's work under consideration here.

10 Don Lee, Directions (Detroit, 1971) pp 85-87.

11 E M Forster, "Art for Art's Sake", Two Cheers for Democracy (1951). Quotation from Penguin, 1965, p 99.

12 It is ironical that those who, for example, uncritically adopt T S Eliot's formula for poetry (respect for Eliot's own version of the literary tradition, sublimation and "subjection" of the personality, distaste for "physical" and "emotional" styles of composition, etc) may also argue that socialist realism or political theatre are somehow abusing the autonomy and integrity of art. The irony is not likely to be appreciated until literary education teaches the historical and cultural reasons for its judgements as opposed to the proferred aesthetic or universal/moral reasons.

13 Bertolt Brecht: Poems Part ii 1929-1938 (Eyre Methuen), London 1976, p 225, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim. See also below p. 202 ff.

14 In, for example, "Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann", The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (1957). 1963 Merlin ed, trans. John and Necke Mander.

15 See below p. 54 ff.

16 The problem is implied in Eagleton's description: "The text, we may say, gives us certain socially determined representations of the real cut loose from any particular real conditions to which those representations refer", Criticism and Ideology (1976). Verso ed, 1978, p 74. All citations in my text are from the Verso ed, 1978.

17 F R Leavis "Literature and Society", The Common Pursuit (1952), p 193.

18 F R Leavis "Sociology and Literature", The Common Pursuit (1952), p 198.

19 "Literature and Society", p 193. Terry Eagleton has graphically shown where such "ideological arrogance" comes to rest, for "there are men and women around who manage, astonishingly, to be both mature and civilised, yet who have never read a word of Henry James ... Part of the job of a Marxist critic is to give a voice to those who are necessarily silent: to tell the ruling class, for example, that the experience of working men and women in struggle has been incomparably richer than anything of which James could have conceived". Terry Eagleton, "Literature and Politics Now", Critical Quarterly, Vol 20, No 3, Autumn 1978, p 69.

20 A characteristic of the work of Lukacs, Goldmann and Raymond Williams.

21 Terence Eagleton, Shakespeare and Society (1970), p 9.

22 Jeremy Hawthorn, Identity and Relationship (1973), pp 19-20, discusses the term as used in Marxist criticism (particularly in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks).

23 R Williams, Politics and Letters (1979) p 240.

24 Sebastiano Timpanaro, On Materialism (1975), p 34.

25 Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, pp 178-179.

26 Raymond Williams, "Problems of Materialism", NLR, 109, May/June 1978, p 10. Reprinted in Problems in Materialism and Culture (1980), p. 113.

27 The book behind this effort, of course, is Raymond Williams's The Country and the City (1973), which Perry Anderson, Anthony Barnett and Francis Mulhern have called "... a profoundly original and important book politically ... represents a progression beyond the characteristic problematic of classical Marxism ..." Raymond Williams, Politics and Letters (1979), p 315. The Country and the City deals with the clearly materialistic aspects of rural writing, whereas I am trying to include this and also take the argument further into a metaphysical/philosophical dimension.

28 Adolfo Vázquez, Art and Society (1965). Quotation here from Monthly Review Press, ed 1973, p 84.

29 George Steiner, Language and Silence (1967), pp 393-394.

30 Raymond Williams, Culture and Society (1958). Quotation from Pelican ed, 1961, p 271. This edition used for all quotations in my text.

31 McLellan, p 389.

32 Stuart Hall, "The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the Sociology of Knowledge", On Ideology: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 10, 1977, p 16.

33 Graham Hough, in "Criticism as a Humanist Discipline", Contemporary Criticism, ed. Bradbury and Palmer (1970), has said that only Marxist methodology is available to relate literature and society, and Bernard Bergonzi in a lecture, "The End of Ideological Innocence", at Manchester Polytechnic on 30 March 1974, claimed that the only thinking so far about the relationship of ideology to literature has been Marxist. By 1978, however, Bergonzi (encouraged by anti-Marxist economic theory and dismayed by the ascendancy of Althusser) was much less enthusiastic: "Even so, I think that Marxism does contain aspects of truth, which we cannot ignore ...", Further thoughts about Marxism and Literature,

Critical Quarterly, Vol 20, No 4, Winter 1978, p 49. Bergonzi resists the implications of seeing Literature as a social institution and generally he does not want to get too involved: "These are matters on which present-day Marxists are in fact divided and they can get on with their own arguments". Ibid, p 53. But to admit the unique contribution of Marxist criticism, as Bergonzi still does, surely means a more serious engagement with the arguments.

34 Criticism and Ideology, p 79.

35 Ibid, p 78.

36 George Thomson, "The Art of Poetry", Marxists on Literature, ed. D.Craig (1975), p 57.

37 loc. cit.

38 In his six laws, Craig refers to the relationship between genre and class: as he intimates, further work in this field requires "social historians and sociologically trained critics of the mass media as well as literary critics" - a development that has very much strengthened since the early seventies. David Craig, "Towards Laws of Literary Development" in Marxists on Literature (1975), p 160.

39 Loc cit.

40 Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (1976), p 78.

41 See Criticism and Ideology, p 44 ff.

42 Marxism and Literary Criticism, p 53.

43 Criticism and Ideology, pp 11-17.

44 Ibid, p 13.

45 Loc cit.

46 Raymond Williams, "Lucien Goldmann and Marxism's Alternative Tradition", The Listener, 23 March 1972, pp 375-376

47 See Criticism and Ideology, pp 22-3, for a penetrating comment on Williams's literary style in relation to this personal procedure.

48 Politics and Letters, p 98.

49 Culture and Society, p 99.

50 Ibid, p 119.

51 Culture and Society, p 108.

52 Preface to Film (1954), pp 21-22.

53 Politics and Letters, p 199.

54 Politics and Letters, p 62. The quote is from Ibsen's When We Dead Awaken.

55 Ibid, p 63.

56 R Williams, The Long Revolution (1961), Quotation from Pelican ed, 1965, p 63.

57 Ibid, p 64.

58 Marxism and Literature, p 134.

59 The Long Revolution, p 65.

60 Marxism and Literature, pp 133-134.

61 Ibid, p 133.

62 Ibid, pp 132-133.

63 Ibid, p 132.

64 Politics and Literature, p 159.

65 Stuart Hall, "A Critical Survey of the Theoretical and Practical Achievements of the Last Ten Years", Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature (University of Essex, 1977) ed. Francis Barker et al, pp 1-2.

66 Ibid, p 2.

67 Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, p 33.

68 Michael Green, "Raymond Williams and Cultural Studies", Cultural Studies, 6, 1974, p 32. In bringing together the study of subjective meanings and objective social structures, claims Green, "The Long Revolution tends to read as though we should study either middle-class feelings or working-class institutions; the feelings of working-class people, and the institutions of the middle-class, are both neglected". Ibid, p 43.

69 Politics and Letters, p 156 ff.

70 Ibid, p 169. As the New Left Review editors point out, the Althusserian account of experience (as illusion or the ideological disguise of the real forces of history) diametrically opposes Williams's basic early belief (he has since modified it) in experience as the "domain of direct truth". Macherey and Eagleton are both working within this counter tradition which sees the literary text as fundamentally produced by "the operation of one or more ideological contradictions to the point where those contradictions cannot be resolved within ideology", P Macherey and E Balibar, "Sur la littérature comme forme ideologique: quelques hypotheses marxistes", Littérature, No 14, p 138, quoted in Stuart Hall, "The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the 'Sociology of Knowledge'", On Ideology: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 10, (University of Birmingham, 1977), p 20. Criticism's task, to Eagleton, is "to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its very letter) about which it is necessarily silent", T Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, p 43. For Williams, the literary text can itself go beyond ideological contradiction through the operation of individual experience and the creation of new structures of feeling. The essential difference between Williams and Macherey/Eagleton is on the scope of ideology - for the latter the text is "a certain production of ideology", Criticism and Ideology, p 64, while for Williams (still) experience is a wider category than ideology or is at least not entirely explicable by ideology.

71 "The notion of a structure of feeling was designed to focus a mode of historical and social relations which was yet quite internal to the work, rather than deducible from it or supplied by some external placing or classification, "Politics and Letters, p 164.

72 Ibid, p 159.

73 Ibid, p 166.

74 Ibid, p 306. Some of my reservations are expressed in my comments on Terry Eagleton's discussion of "myth" and "legend" as reactionary and progressive categories. See below pp 203-204.

75 Raymond Williams, "Notes on Marxism in Britain since 1945", in Problems in Materialism and Culture (1978), p 245. First published in New Left Review, 100, November 1976-January 1977.

76 Williams, Problems, p 36. First published in New Left Review, 82, November-December 1973.

77 Williams, "Literature and Sociology: in Memory of Lucien Goldmann", Problems, p 19. First published in New Left Review, 67, May-June 1971.

78 Loc cit.

79 John Berger, Ways of Seeing (1972), p.10

80 Joan Rockwell, Fact in Fiction (1974), p.117

81 Ibid, p.122

82 Ibid, pp.vii and viii

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1 "Examination of Concepts of Nature in the Poetry of Robert Bly, Gary Snyder and Galway Kinnell", unpub thesis (University of Keele, 1978), p 1.

2 Ibid, p 178.

3 It is significant that an exception, Adrian Mitchell, wrote notable poetry about the Vietnam war.

4 The sentiments of Kingsley Amis's 'Against Romanticism', though published in 1956, would not seem out of place in many poems of the 60's and 70's. New Lines ed. Robert Conquest (1956), pp 45-46.

5 Raymond Williams, Keywords (1976), p 187.

6 W W Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama (1906).

7 Samuel Pepys, The Diary of Samuel Pepys, 2 vols, intro. R Garnett (Everyman ed. 1906, rep. 1943), p 379.

8 C S Lewis, The Allegory of Love (1936).

9 William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (1935), Peregrine ed. 1966, p 25.

10 Laurence Lerner, The Uses of Nostalgia (1972), p 19.

11 William Shakespeare, As You Like It, ed. Arthur Quiller Couch and John Dover Wilson (1926), p 30.

12 John Milton, The Poems of John Milton, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (1968), p 134. ll. 41-44.

13 Ibid, p 136, l.67.

14 i.e. the content of the painterly lines (69-82) with their russet lawns, fallows grey, nibbling flocks, barren mountains in the background, meadows, brooks, rivers, towers, battlements, tufted trees and smoking cottage chimney.

15 Milton, Poems, pp 136-137, ll.83-88.

16 Some of Seamus Heaney's poems benefit from a similar direct connection with folk-lore.

17 Milton, Poems, pp 137-138.

18 Ibid, p 139. ll.133-134.

19 George Puttenham says, "the Poet devised the Eglogue long after the other dramatick poems, not of purpose to counterfait or represent the rusticall manners of loves and communication, but under the vaile of homely persons

and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters". The Arte of English Poesie in Elizabethan Critical Essays, 2 vols, ed. G G Smith (Oxford, 1904), II, p 40.

20 Isabel Rivers has a chapter, "Public Poetry and its Context", on this matter in The Poetry of Conservatism (Cambridge, 1973).

21 D M Friedman, Marvell's Pastoral Art (1970), p 5.

22 Williams, The Country and the City (1973), pp 55-58.

23 Andrew Marvell, "An Horatian Ode", ll. 25-26, The Complete English Poems, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (1972), p 55.

24 Ibid, p 56, ll. 41-44.

25 Friedman, Marvell's Pastoral Art, p 13.

26 Friedman rejects Renato Poggioli's contention, in "The Oaten Flute", Harvard Library Bulletin, XI, 2 (Spring 1957), pp 147-184, that "the psychological root of the pastoral is a double longing after innocence and happiness, to be recovered not through conversation or regeneration, but merely through a retreat". Poggioli opposes "the bucolic ideal" to the Christian one.

27 Empson says the chief point of "The Garden" is, through the implications of the metaphors, "to contrast and reconcile conscious and unconscious states, intuitive and intellectual modes of apprehension ;" Some Versions of Pastoral, p 99.

28 Marvell, Poems, p 101, ll. 51-53.

29 Ibid, p 102, ll. 65-66.

30 Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, p 17.

31 Williams, The Country and the City, p 18.

32 John Bull, "Raymond Williams, His Country", Delta, No 52, p 30.

33 This is Bull's main worry about the whole book. He speaks of "(Herrick's) deliberate humour that belies all Williams's efforts to read the poem as some kind of affront to his own childhood", "large sections read(s) more like what we are accustomed to think of as a novel than a work of scholarship", "the subjective authority of a Williams", (p 31), etc. Williams certainly writes from a refreshingly personal point of view and declares his interests from the outset, but this is nothing more than a statement of motivation - the argument always has an objective base. John Bull writes, "A frequent way of developing the argument is, 'I have heard by word of mouth so many such stories, down to my father's generation, that I believe it to be centrally so!'"(p 31). This is certainly the nearest Williams ever gets to "you'd better believe it", but in fact the context of this remark puts a different light on the matter. The "many such stories" (about rural hardship and hardening

feelings of resistance) are amply supported by literary references in the text (to Alexander, Somerville, Joseph Arch, Joseph Ashby, etc) and are, today, uncontroversial in any case - almost common-place of our social history.

34 Williams, The Country and the City, p 73.

35 Not that such problems do not occur in Henry IV. Shakespeare writes Hal's soliloquy ("I know you all and will awhile uphold/ The unyok'd humour of your idleness". H IV (i), I.ii.190 ff) to avoid a total dramatisation of Hal. We do not read the 'sun-king' language of this speech as we read it in Richard II, though it is essentially the same language: here, we happily follow the "Mirror for Magistrates" line, approvingly quoting Johnson's view that the speech keeps "the prince from appearing vile in the opinion of the audience". Yet this does not uncover the real interest of Hal in these two plays, which is a matter of conflict and tension and which Shakespeare by no means handles with uniform skill and conviction.

36 Raymond Williams is not alone in this critical approach. See the Introduction to The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse, ed: John Barrell and John Bull (1975), where the pastoral vision is described as functioning "to mystify and obscure the harshness of actual social and economic organisation".

37 Williams, Country, p 26.

38 Alexander Pope, The Poems of Alexander Pope (Twickenham Ed.) Vols I-XI, ed. Maynard Mack (1969), p 59.

39 In D Nichol Smith (ed) The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse (1926), p 1.

40 There had been enclosure movements for at least 500 years, of course, and these were particularly prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but it is the perception of their significance by writers and the imaginative use of these perceptions (not always for social reform by any means) that characterises much eighteenth century poetry.

41 Like these attacks on Crabbe: "in Crabbe there is an absolute defect of the high imagination" - S T Coleridge, "Table Talk", Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. T M Raysor (1930), pp 432-3; "The object of Mr Crabbe's writings seems to be, to show what an unpoetical world we live in ... If the most feigning poetry is the truest, Mr Crabbe is of all poets the

least poetical" - W Hazlitt. "Living Authors - No V, Crabbe", London Magazine, May 1821, iii, pp 484-490. Rep. in Arthur Pollard (ed), Crabbe, the Critical Heritage (1972).

42 George G Williams, "The Beginnings of Nature Poetry in the Eighteenth Century", Studies in Philology, 1930, Vol 27, pp 583-608.

43 James Thomson, Poetical Works, ed. J Logie Robertson (1908), pp 105-106. ll. 1438-45; 1453-56.

44 Ibid, pp 145-146. ll. 350-359.

45 Ibid, p 178. ll. 1284-6.

46 Ibid, pp 99-103.

47 Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse (1952), rev. ed. 1967, describes diction as a selection of language involving words "thrusting at the poem and being fended off from it" (p 5). John Arthos, The Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth Century Poetry (1949), p 88, showed the frequent occurrence of words we think of as poetic diction ("beamy", "moony", "shiny", etc) in seventeenth and eighteenth century scientific writing i.e. the "generalisation" actually pin-points. Davie follows this with a passage pointing out that the frequent use of generalised words like "grove" was motivated by deism - to see all woods as groves, implying they are planted, could be to see them as "all in the park of the creator-god" (p 43). So when I talk of "renovation of poetic diction", I am not referring disparagingly to "good" poetic diction, but rather to what Davie calls (p 6) the bad poet's unthinking adoption of currently fashionable poetic language.

48 Thomson, Poetical Works, pp 67-68. ll. 387-393.

49 Ibid, p 9. ll. 170-172.

50 See A O Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (1938).

51 John Barrell, The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840 (Cambridge, 1972), accepts that the eighteenth century assumed a direct connection between the painter Claude's way of looking at landscape and Thomson's. He quotes, as one example, Thomas Twining explaining that the ancients "had no Thomsons because they had no Claudes, "Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry (1789), Dissertation 1, "On Poetry considered as an imitative art", reprinted in Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays, ed. Elledge (New York, 1961), vol II, p 1001. Ralph Cohen, The Art of Discrimination (1964), takes the opposite view to Twining and Barrell.

52 See Nichol Smith, The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse (1926), pp 269-274.

53 Robert Melville, "Countries of the Mind", New Statesman, 30/11/73, p 830.

54 Barrell, Idea of Landscape, p 43.

55 Ibid, pp 36-37.

56 See D Nichol Smith, Some Observations on Eighteenth Century Poetry, The Alexander Lectures, University of Toronto, 1937 (University of Toronto Press, 1937), pp 56-80, on Thomson's early experience of the Scottish border.

57 Quoted by Arthos, The Language of Natural Description, p 8.

58 Thomson, Poetical Works, p 195. ll. 252-256.

59 Rep. in Roger Lonsdale (ed), The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith (1969), p 675.

60 In the Monthly Review, xliii, pp 440-5, quoted by Lonsdale (ed), The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith, p 672.

61 Lonsdale, p 679 ll. 89-90; p 685 ll. 213-214; p 683 ll. 179-80.

62 George Crabbe, Tales, 1812 and Other Selected Poems, ed. Howard Mills (Cambridge, 1967), p 1. ll. 21-22; p 2, ll. 53-54; p 9, Bk II, ll. 1-2.

63 Ibid, p 11. Bk II, ll. 93-94.

64 Ibid, p 4. Bk I, ll. 136-137.

65 Raymond Williams's account of Stephen Duck's career, in Chapter IX of The Country and the City, provides a striking illustration of real experience (and precise language) being replaced by something theoretical and second-hand (in socially ratifying but elaborately imprecise language). The movement of "The Village" parallels Duck's life.

66 I take this to be the best feature of Cowper's "Yardley Oak" (1791) in Poems, ed. H I'A Fausset (1931). I cannot see the expression of the dialectic of change seen by Raymond Williams (The Country and the City, p 71) in this poem. The six lines he quotes are not an "intermediate reflection" but the end of a paragraph of seventeen lines beginning:

> What exhibitions various hath the world
> Witness'd of mutability in all
> That we account most durable below!

Throughout the poem the tree remains a conventional subject for a meditation on mutability - like Yorick's skull or Jaques' stage. But Shakespeare's catching of the dialectic of change is not in these particular passages. It is, as I was suggesting earlier, woven into the comprehensiveness of his work. There is no such comprehensiveness in "Yardley Oak", which, apart from its floundering, incomplete end, is a well-controlled, though conventional meditation It does have, however, a particularity of description:

Embowell'd now, and of thy ancient self
Possessing nought but the scoop'd rind, that seems
A huge throat calling to the clouds for drink ....

The image of the spreading roots "crook'd into a thousand whimsies" is another example of this quality.

67 See Donald Davie, "John Clare", New Statesman, 19 June 1964.

68 The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1780 (1966).

69 Barrell, Idea of Landscape, p 189.

70 Ibid, p 194.

71 John Clare, Selected Poems and Prose, ed. Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield (1966), p 197 ll. 25-8.

72 Ibid, p 206. ll.45-50

73 Ibid, p 114.

74 Ibid, p 190 ll. 69-70.

75 The Shepherd's Calendar, ed. Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield (Oxford, 1964), p 9.

76 Ibid, pp 55-56. From "May".

77 Barrell, pp 132-4, makes an interesting comparison between the language of Thomson and Clare when he says that Clare has a dozen words for different parts of the rural landscape where Thomson has "mead" and "field" alone. This is part of Barrell's general argument (see pp 96-7) that Clare put forward his sense of place, in the old, unenclosed Helpston, against both the new enclosed village with its loss of self-containment and identity and the traditions of rural poetry (detached generalisation, comparing one landscape with another or, as in Thomson, imposing a structure on landscape).

78 Clare, Calendar, p 28. From "February. A Thaw".

79 Ibid, p 5. From "January. A Winter's Day".

80 Raymond Williams sees Clare's "green language" as a means of preserving human values in times of hardship through a withdrawal into Nature; this brings Clare to the verge of Wordsworth's romanticism. The Country and the City, p 136 ff.

81 The Prose of John Clare, ed. J W and Anne Tibble (1951), p 174.

82 Robinson and Summerfield, Clare, p 56.

83 J W and Anne Tibble (ed), Letters of John Clare, 1951. Taylor to Clare, 4 March 1826 (quoted Robinson and Summerfield, p 30).

84 Quoted by Mark Storey, The Poetry of John Clare (1974), p 25. Storey also quotes (p 203) Clare's comment on some lines by Peter Pindar, "'Merry companys of blue bells dance/Beneath the under wood': False image - they seldom stir but like other tenants of wood are remarkable for stillness". Peterborough M S, in Peterborough Museum.

85 The Uses of Nostalgia, p 40.

86 John Middleton Murry, John Clare and Other Studies (1950), pp 7-17. Reprinted in Clare: The Critical Heritage, ed Mark Storey (1973), p 336.

87 Storey, Heritage, p 338.

88 Robert Graves, "Peasant Poet", Hudson Review, Spring 1955, viii, pp 99-105. Reprinted in Storey, Heritage, p 414.

89 Robinson and Summerfield, Clare, p 131.

90 Ibid, pp 126-128.

91 Ibid, p 117.

92 See also Chapter XIII of Williams's, The Country and the City, pp 127-141.

93 Robinson and Summerfield, Clare.

94 Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poetical Works (Oxford Standard Authors, 1953). p 243.

95 Loc cit.

96 Jon Silkin, Nature with Man (1965).

97 V G Kiernan, "Wordsworth and the People", from Democracy and the Labour Movement, ed. John Saville (1956). Reprinted in Craig, Marxists on Literature (1975), pp 161-206. Quotation p 201.

98 In Essential Works of John Stuart Mill, J S Mill, Autobiography (1873), ed. Max Lerner (New York, 1961), p 91.

99 William Wordsworth, The Complete Poetical Works, introduction by John Morley (1888), p 205.

100 The same is true of Edward Thomas's poems of "landscape, nearly all of it without humanity except what it may owe to a lanky shadow of myself". See Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley, ed. R George Thomas (1968), p 80.

101 F R Leavis, Revaluation (1936), Peregrine ed.1964, p. 146

102 Ibid, p 145.

103 Ibid, p 137.

104 Ibid, p 134.

105 Ibid, p 136.

106 William Wordsworth, The Prelude, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (1933), p 29. From Book II, ll. 334-337.

107 Basil Willey, in The Eighteenth-Century Background (1940), Peregrine ed 1962, takes "Nature" as his key-word and is able to illuminate much of the philosophical and imaginative writing of the century. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, he finds the most complicated intertwining of the different meanings of this most difficult concept: "the Revolution was made in the name of Nature, Burke attacked it in the name of Nature ..." (1962 ed, p 196). This word, "which carries, over a very long period, many of the major variations of human thought" (Williams, Keywords, p 189), is painstakingly traced by Willey through to its divinisation in Wordsworth. Willey's analysis is particularly challenging here, because it describes a movement, tangentially related to Wordsworth's poetry, from social involvement to isolated religiosity. Broadly, Willey sees Wordsworth's turning to Nature as political reaction - the abstract is replaced by the actual, "meddling intellect" is introduced to explain revolutionary thought (previously seen as the result of Nature's teaching) and Nature and Feeling are substituted for Nature and Reason. Willey stresses the importance of the healing power of Nature to Wordsworth: "In any attempt to understand what 'Nature' meant to Wordsworth, due weight should be given, I think, to the healing power of the impersonal over a sick mind" (p 256).

Heart's ease is found in a religion of Nature. Willey finds the idea of "following Nature" to be as old as the Cynics, Stoics and Epicureans (p 72); it is revived by the Renaissance humanists like More and Montaigne and is enthusiastically expressed by Shaftesbury. Willey concludes that "the Wordsworthian nature-religion can be regarded, less as something wholly new, than as the culmination of a process which had been implicit in the 'humanist' tradition ever since the Renaissance" (p 67); his account finishes with Wordsworth turning to religion itself: "in the later life of our greatest 'Nature' poet .... there is a steady retreat towards the religious sources of his mysticism and grace supplants the visionary gleam" (p 277).

108 Though Coleridge embraced doctrines of the healing powers of Nature more strongly than Wordsworth, as his play Osorio or "The Nightingale" indicate. These may be compared with the reticence of Nature breathing "a second breath,/More searching than the breath of spring" in Wordsworth's "Peter Bell".

109 S T Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (1817). Everyman ed. 1906, pp 156-157.

110 Basil Willey in The Eighteenth Century Background, having discussed Hartley's account of "how Nature builds up for us 'the being that we are' from sensation through imagination to reflection" (p 134) continues with an explanation of the pleasures of the Imagination in terms of the principles of Association:

> For instance, our delight in the Beauty of Nature (the first kind of imaginative pleasure he considers) is built out of such original elements as delight in tastes, colours, smells of flowers and fruit, warmth and coolness, country sports and pastimes, together with the healthfulness, tranquility and innocence of the country contrasted with the offensiveness, dangers and corruptions of cities. Thus, in vacant or in pensive mood, or amidst the dreary intercourse of daily life, there may come gleams like the flashing of a shield, and spots of time may be recalled, whereby the mind is nourished and invisibly repaired (p 142).

111 Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley: Selected Poetry, Prose and Letters, Nonsesuch, ed. (1951), p. 1030

112 Poetry was believed to possess a visionary, spiritual power and thus was socially central. There are echoes of this confidence in poetry's spiritual power when Pound exhorted poets to try to be great, not just good, when Bunting mourns the poet's loss of centrality in Section IV of "Briggflatts":

> Clear Cymric voices carry well this autumn night,
> Aneurin and Taliesin, cruel owls
> for whom it is never altogether dark, crying
> before the rules made poetry a pedant's game,

and when R S Thomas turns to poetry for religious truth.

113 Coleridge's own celebrated definitions (Biographia, Chapter XIII) still seem to me the best attempt at defining the special qualities of both the poet and the achievement of poetry. Consider particularly, the relation between Primary Imagination in Coleridge and creativity in Marx (see my p 18 above).

114 Wordsworth, The Prelude, ll. 525-529 in the 1850 text, which is quoted here. Poetical Works, p 274.

115 The Country and the City, p 127

116 Ibid, pp 130-131

117 A C Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry (1909), pp 143-4.

118 Matthew Arnold, "On the Modern Element in Literature", writing of fifth century Greece speaks of "the highly developed human nature of that age". In On the Classical Tradition, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, I, ed. R. H. Super (University of Michigan, 1960)

119 Wordsworth, Poetical Works, p 97.

120 Loc cit.

121 Wordsworth's own introduction to the poem - text of 1800. Ibid, p 95.

122 Loc cit.

123 Ibid, p 96.

124 Ibid, p 98.

125 J P Ward, "Wordsworth and the Sociological Idea", Critical Quarterly, Vol 16, No 4, Winter 1974, pp 345-6.

126 Ibid, p 176.

127 Loc cit.

128 Ibid, p 169. From "Beggars".

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism, p 8, puts it like this:

> ".... Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence - are political conservatives who each had truck with fascism. Marxist criticism, rather than apologising for that fact, explains it - sees that in the absence of a genuinely revolutionary art, only a radical conservatism, hostile like Marxism to the withered values of liberal bourgeois society, could produce the most significant literature."

2 Those familiar with Jakobson's formalist theory of the metaphoric and metonymic modes in literature may suggest this as an alternative analytical approach both here and for my thesis as a whole: certainly there are striking parallels with the materialistic and metaphysical poles I have suggested for looking at rural and nature poetry, and it would be illuminating to follow these up in more detail. David Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing (1977), would be a good starting-point, as his book attempts a systematic, practical application of Jakobson to modern literary texts.

3 Alvarez, in his "Introduction" to The New Poetry (1962) did, of course, identify some British poetry in opposition to the dominant mood. In a 1973 radio talk entitled "Larkin and Larkinism", Donald Hall attacked poetry in The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse, ed. P Larkin (1973) for its provincialism, self-deprecation and lack of seriousness.

4 Donald Davie, "Thomas Hardy and British Poetry", Poetry Nation One, p 2.

5 In High Windows (1974), p 17.

6 "Mr Bleaney", The Whitsun Weddings (1964), p 10. "An Arundel Tomb", Whitsun Weddings, pp 45-46.

7 Eagleton, Criticism & Ideology, p 151.

8 Loc cit.

9 Robert Bridges, Poetical Works (1913), pp 248-250.

10 Keith Sagar, Ted Hughes (1972), p 3.

11 In An Acre of Land (1952). Reprinted in Song at the Year's Turning (1965), p 45.

12 Philip Larkin, The North Ship (1945). Rep. 1966, p 10.

13 "Church Going", The Less Deceived (1955), p 28

14 "Deceptions" from The Less Deceived, p 37

15 In Poets of the Nineties; a Biographical Introduction. ed. Derek Stanford (1965), p.158.

16 John Harrison, The Reactionaries (1966), p 39.

17 Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (1961), p 24.

18 "The Stolen Child", W B Yeats, Collected Poems (1950), p 20

19 The Letters of W B Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (1954), p 63.

20 Yeats, Poems, p.21.

21 "The Symbolism of Poetry", Essays and Introductions (1961), p.163

22 Yeats, Poems, p. 275

23 W B Yeats, Autobiographies (1955).

24 W B Yeats, Essays and Introductions (1961), pp178 and p.185.

25 Stephen Spender, The Struggle of the Modern (1963).

26 Yeats, Poems, p 226

27 Ibid, p 385

28 Ibid, p 180

29 Spender, The Struggle of the Modern, p 164.

30 W B Yeats, Autobiographies, p 153.

31 Loc cit.

32 Stanford ed. Poets of the Nineties, p.114.

33 W B Yeats, Autobiographies, p 153.

34 In Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, ed. E Marsh (1912)

35 W B Yeats, Poems, p 142

36 Stephen Spender, "Introduction" to Love-Hate Relations (1974).

37 See Norman Marlow, A E Housman, Scholar and Poet (1958), p 9.

38 A E Housman, "Last Poems", No XL in The Collected Poems of A E Housman (1939). Published by Penguin as A E Housman: Collected Poems (1956), p 153. All quotations from this edition, which is referred to as Housman.

39 A E Housman, "A Shropshire Lad", No 1. Housman, p 22.

40 No XLVII, Ibid, pp 81-82.

41 No XXXV, Ibid, p 64.

42 No VII, Ibid, p 30.

43 No II, Ibid, p 23.

44 No XLI, Ibid, p 71.

45 William Blake, Poetry and Prose ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Nonesuch ed. 1927), p.75.

46 Ibid, p 375

47 The pleasant village-type housing built by Cadburys for their employees at Bournville shows this thinking actually carried out. The machine-operator so housed may well come to believe that the country is the true anti-dote to the tedium and hardships of factory-life.

48 "The Recruit", Housman, pp 24-25.

49 There'll always be an England
While there's a country lane,
Wherever there's a cottage small
Beside a field of grain.

"Song of Second World War, 1939", Ross Parker and Hughie Charles. Quoted from The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations

50 The grim optimism of this poem is matched by the contented pessimism of No XXXII of More Poems - the "nettles" poem.

51 The imitation Wordsworth of Abercrombie's "Ryton Firs" in Georgian Poetry 1920-1922 ed. Edward Marsh (1922), p 3, indicates how these notions were kept alive by a fairly typical Georgian. T S Eliot blamed poor criticism for poor use of the Romantics:

> Because we have never learned to criticise Keats,
> Shelley and Wordsworth (poets of assured though modest
> merit) Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth punish us from their
> graves with the annual scourge of the Georgian Anthology.

T S Eliot in The Egoist, May 1918 - "Observations" by T S Apteryx.

52 Graham Hough, The Dark Sun (1956), p 201.

53 See Robert Ross, The Georgian Revolt (1967) and John Press, A Map of Modern English Verse (1969).

54 The five volumes were:
Edward Marsh, ed. Georgian Poetry 1911-1912 (1912). Hereafter referred to as GP I.
Edward Marsh, ed. Georgian Poetry 1913-1915 (1915). Hereafter referred to as GP II.
Edward Marsh, ed. Georgian Poetry 1916-1917 (1917). Hereafter referred to as GP III.
Edward Marsh, ed. Georgian Poetry 1918-1919 (1919). Hereafter referred to as GP IV.
Edward Marsh, ed. Georgian Poetry 1920-1922 (1922). Hereafter referred to as GP V.

55 T S Eliot, "Reflections on Vers Libre", New Statesman, VIII, 1917, pp 518-519.

56 Letter to Edward Marsh post-marked 19.11.13. See Ross, Georgian Revolt, p 108.

57 C K Stead, The New Poetic (1964), p 110.

58 Ross, Georgian Revolt, p 128.

59 GP III, pp 82-86.

60 Ross, Georgian Revolt, p 253.

61 Ibid, p 250.

62 GP II, p 69.

63 Edith Sitwell, Aspects of Modern Poetry (1934), pp 18-19. Quoted by Ross, Georgian Revolt, p 196.

64 Gordon Bottomley's "The End of the World" (GP I) manages in a different way to express the integration of a profound moment in nature with the mental state of the poet.

65 See "Introduction", note 2.

66 From "Easter", GP III, p 160.

67 GP III, p 129.

68 Ibid, p 131.

69 Consider T E Hulme's "Above the Dock" rep. in Imagist Poetry, ed. Peter Jones (1972), p 48.

> Above the quiet dock in midnight,
> Tangled in the tall mast's corded height,
> Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
> Is but a child's balloon, forgotten after play.

But see Glenn Hughes's telling comparison, quoted by C H Sisson, English Poetry 1900-1950 (1971), pp 59-60, of two versions of a poem by F S Flint. The original version, "A Swan Song" in In the Net of the Stars was followed by an "Imagist" version in the anthology Des Imagistes in 1914; here are the opening lines:

(1) Among the lily leaves the swan,
The pale, cold lily leaves, the swan,
With mirrored neck, a silver streak

Tipped with a tarnished copper beak,
Towards the dark arch floats slowly on;
The water is deep and black beneath
the arches ....

(2) Over the green cold leaves
and the rippled silver
and the tarnished copper
of its neck and beak,
towards the deep black water
beneath the arches,
the swan floats slowly.

As Sisson says, "the rhythm has gone; the emotion has gone". We are left with ill-assorted visual effects which do not crystallise into an image, for it is clear that this poem is as much about movement as image.

70 GPV, p.30.

71 F R Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (1950), Peregrine ed. 1963, p 60.

72 Robert Graves and Laura Riding, A Survey of Modernist Poetry (1927), p 119.

73 GP IV, pp 81-83.

74 GP II, p 162.

75 Ibid, p 143.

76 Athenaeum, no 4, 675. 5 December 1919, pp 1,283-5. Reprinted as "The Present Condition of English Poetry", in Aspects of Literature (1920), pp 139-149. Quoted by Ross, Georgian Revolt, p 231.

77 "Review of Books: Georgian Poetry 1911-1912", in Phoenix (1936), pp 304-305.

78 Vivian de Sola Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940 (1952), 2nd ed. 1955, p 23.

79 Loc cit.

80 John Masefield, "The Everlasting Mercy", Collected Poems (1923), pp 91-92.

81 GP I, pp 119-130.

82 GP II, pp 3-50.

83 Ibid, p 13.

84 GP I, pp 33-37.

85 Rupert Brooke, The Poetical Works of Rupert Brooke (1946), Faber ed, 1955, p 19.

86 GP I, p 99.

87 GP II, p 130.

88 GP I, p 148.

89 Ibid, p 77.

90 Ibid, p 105.

91 Masefield, Poems, p 131.

92 Brooke, Poetical Works, pp 78-80.

93 GP II, pp 51-53.

94 Ibid, p 58.

95 Ibid, pp 154-155.

96 Ibid, pp 156-160.

97 GP I, p 190.

98 GP II, p 157.

99 In The Complete Poems of D H Lawrence vol I, ed V de Sola Pinto and W Roberts (1964), p 36.

100 Ibid, p 348 "... in the tension of opposites all things have their being ..."

101 D H Lawrence, Women in Love (1921) Phoenix ed. 1954

102 GP III, pp 30-38.

103 GP I, pp 183-192.

104 Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry, p 131.

105 GP I, pp 165-171.

106 GP V, pp 125-128.

107 In "Contemporary Poetry", Scrutinies, ed. Edgell Rickwood (1928), p 172.

108 David Craig, The Real Foundations (1973)

109 Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism", Selected Essays, ed. Noel Annan (World's Classics, 1964), p 16.

110 Leavis, Revaluation (1936). Peregrine, 1964, p 156.

111 Leavis, New Bearings, pp 16-17.

112 Leavis, Revaluation, p 159.

113 Matthew Arnold, Poetical Works, Oxford Standard Authors, ed. C. B. Tinker and M. F. Lowry (1950), p.256.

114 Ibid, p 268

115 In a letter to Tom Arnold of 15 May 1857, in Mrs H Ward, A Writer's Recollections (1918), p 54.

116 GP III, p 143.

117 Williams, The Country and the City, pp 26-34.

118 GP III, p 143.

119 Quoted by Stead, The New Poetic, pp 74-75.

120 GP IV, p 55.

121 Loc cit.

122 GP V, pp 125-126.

123 GP V, pp 15-23.

124 GP IV, pp 22-23.

125 GP II, pp 195-239.

126 See Ross, Revolt, p 151.

127 GP III, pp 142-143.

128 GP V, p 124.

129 Owen, of course, did not actually publish in the Georgian anthologies.

130 Wilfred Owen, The Poems of Wilfred Owen, ed. Edmund Blunden (1931), 1966 ed, pp 53-54.

131 Loc cit.

132 GP III, p 44.

133 Bernard Bergonzi, The Turn of a Century (1973), p 148.

134 See Edward Thomas, Edward Thomas: Poems and Last Poems, ed. Edna Longley (1973), p 236.

135 Loc cit.

136 Ibid, p 70.

137 Williams, The Country and the City, p 258

138 Leavis, New Bearings, p 64.

139 GP IV, p 70.

140 Thomas, Poems, ed. Longley, pp 236-237.

141 Ibid, p 287.

142 Ibid, pp 31-32.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, p 181.

2 Thomas Hardy, "Apology", Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922), in Thomas Hardy, The Complete Poems, ed. James Gibson (1976), p 561.

3 Quoted by Ross, Georgian Revolt, p 253.

4 T S Eliot, After Strange Gods (1934). In T S Eliot, Selected Prose, Penguin, 1953, pp 184-185.

5 Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, p 11. See above p 73-74 for my criticism of this view that poetry can "work things out".

6 Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That (1929), p 377.

7 Hardy, Complete Poems, pp 330-331.

8 Ibid, p 466. This is the complete text of "A January Night", written in 1879.

9 Ibid, pp 825-827. The quotation from Psalm 137 is from the version in The Book of Common Prayer.

10 Davie, Thomas Hardy, p 56

11 Leavis, New Bearings, p 51.

12 Hardy, Complete Poems, p 495.

13 Joseph Conrad's phrase in a letter dated 20 December 1897 to R B Cunninghame Graham in G Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters (1927), p 216.

14 From the "Preface" to Poems of Past and Present (1901) in Hardy, Complete Poems, p 84. He repeats the same thoughts in the "Prefaces" of 1909 and 1928.

15 Hardy, Complete Poems, pp 66-67.

16 Ibid, p 123.

17 Ibid, p 122.

18 Ibid, p 121.

19 Ibid, pp 126-127.

20 Ibid, p 111.

21 Ibid, pp 769-770.

22 Ibid, p 446.

23 Ibid, p 786.

24 Ibid, p 877.

25 Ibid, p 822.

26 Ibid, pp 657 and 915.

27 Ibid, pp 807-808.

28 Ibid, p 149. From "The Last Chrysanthemum".

29 Ibid, p 733.

30 See Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, p 27 and Philip Larkin, "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic", The Critical Quarterly, VIII, 2, Summer 1966, p 179.

31 Hardy, Complete Poems, p 842. End of "An Unkindly May".

32 Ibid, p 715. End of "Four in the Morning".

33 Ibid, p 776.

34 Ibid, p 868.

35 Ibid, p 918.

36 Ibid, p 717. From "Coming up Oxford Street: Evening".

37 Ibid, p 927.

38 Ibid, pp 609-610.

39 Ibid, p 157.

40 Ibid, p 234.

41 Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, p 6.

42 Ibid, p 16-17.

43 Hardy, Complete Poems, p 458.

44 Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, pp 22-23.

45 Ibid, p 22.

46 Hardy, Complete Poems, p 743. Second verse of "Nobody Comes".

47 Ibid, pp 305-306.

48 Ibid, p 150.

49 Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (1966), p 166.

50 Edward Thomas, "Robert Frost", The New Weekly, 8 August 1914, p 249. See William Cooke, Edward Thomas, A Critical Biography (1970), pp 71-73.

51 R George Thomas (ed), Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley (1968), p 250.

52 Edward Thomas, Walter Pater (1913), p 210.

53 Thomas, Review of North of Boston, Daily News, 22 July 1914. See Cooke, Edward Thomas, pp 71-73.

54 William Cooke discusses the comparison. See William Cooke, Edward Thomas, p 147.

55 Though Reuben Brower distinguishes Frost's practical modern sensibility from that of Wordsworth and Emerson. See R A Brower, The Poetry of Robert Frost, (New York, 1963), pp 75-101.

56 In an interview in 1931, Frost said: "Poetry is very, very rural-rustic. It stands as a reminder of rural life - as a resource, as a recourse. It might be taken as a symbol of man, taking its rise from individuality and seclusion - written first for the person that writes and then going out into its social appeal and use". E C Lathem (ed), Interviews with Robert Frost (New York, 1967) pp. 75, 76.

57 Letter from Edward Thomas to Robert Frost, 15 December 1914, in Dartmouth College Library, New Hampshire. See Edward Thomas, Poems and Last Poems, ed. Edna Longley (1973), p 399. (Edward Thomas, Poems, was first published in 1917, while Last Poems was published in 1918.)

58 Lathem, Interviews, p 175.

59 From Thomas's poem, "The Sun Used to Shine", Thomas, Poems, ed. Longley, p 117.

60 Robert Frost, The Poetry of Robert Frost, ed. E. C. Lathem (New York, 1969).

61 C Day Lewis wrote in his Penguin Introduction: "If I had to define his poetry in one word, 'wise' is the word I should use". In C Day Lewis (ed), Robert Frost: Selected Poems (1955), p 15.

62 Lathem, Interviews, p 78.

63 Lathem, Interviews, p 77.

64 Thomas, Poems, ed. Longley, p 35.

65 Ibid, p 89.

66 Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, p 61.

67 See Edna Longley, "Edward Thomas and the 'English' Line", The New Review, February 1975, Vol I, No 11, p 5.

68 See Thomas, Poems, ed. Longley, p 231.

69 See, for example, "Over the Hills" (p 40), "The Owl" (p 55) and "For These" (p 94). All references to Longley's edition.

70 Thomas, Poems, ed. Longley, p 119.

71 Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, p 64.

72 H Coombes, Edward Thomas (1956), pp 245-6.

73 Modern readers, merging the steam-age with memories of hot summers, probably cannot avoid importing an extra dimension of nostalgia into this poem.

74 D W Harding, "A Note on Nostalgia", Scrutiny, Vol I, No 1, May 1932, p 18.

75 See Helen Thomas, As It Was, 1926 and World Without End, 1931. Combined ed. reprinted by Faber in 1956.

76 Thomas, R S (ed), Selected Poems of Edward Thomas (1964) p.11

77 Leavis, New Bearings, p 61.

78 Danby J F, "Edward Thomas", Critical Quarterly, Vol I, No 4, Winter 1959, pp 308-317.

79 Thomas, Poems, ed. Longley, p 20.

80 Ibid, p 21.

81 See The Childhood of Edward Thomas (1938), p 16. Quoted by Longley, p 151.

82 See Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, p 150.

83 D H Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious (1923). Phoenix ed. 1961, p 9.

84 D H Lawrence, "Whitman", Selected Essays (Penguin, 1950), p 268.

85 See Pinto's "Introduction" in The Complete Poems of D H Lawrence, 2 vols, eds. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (1964), rev ed, 1972, p 1.

86 Auden, W H The Dyer's Hand (1963), p 288.

87 D. H. Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928) Penguin ed. 1960, p.104

88 Blackmur R P, Language as Gesture (1954), p 289.

89 Hough G, The Dark Sun (1956), p 193.

90 D H Lawrence, "Poetry of the Present" (Introduction to the American Edition of New Poems, 1918). See Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 185.

91 See Pinto's "Introduction" in Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 8.

92 Ibid, p 8.

93 D H Lawrence, "Foreword" to Pansies (1929), Complete Poems, p 423.

94 R Aldington, "Introduction" to Last Poems and More Pansies (1932) in Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 595.

95 Hough (1932), The Dark Sun, p 205.

96 Lawrence, Complete Poems, pp 181-188.

97 Ibid, p 28.

98 Ibid, p 85.

99 In his "Introduction" Pinto writes: "... his mythology is no elegant fiction or learned reconstruction. The gods are realities to him as they were to a Greek poet, and as they have been, perhaps, to no other English poet since Keats". Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 18.

100 D H Lawrence, "Note" (Preface) to Collected Poems, 1928. See Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 27.

101 Ibid, p 48.

102 Ibid, p 285. From "Grapes".

103 Lawrence D H, Etruscan Places (1927). Phoenix ed. 1956, p. 12.

104 Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 623.

105 D H Lawrence, "Indians and an Englishman", Phoenix (1936), p 99.

106 Fantasia of the Unconscious, p 113.

107 Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 665.

108 D H Lawrence, "Democracy" in Phoenix, p 717.

109 From "Cowardice and Impudence", Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 663. The words are revealing: the bourgeois "coward" could, by implication, be brave. Is, then, the bolshevist to be polite or conciliatory and what inferences may be drawn about Lawrence's position if this is so?

110 Ibid, p 641. From "Man and Machine".

111 Ibid, p 632. From "City-Life".

112 Ibid, p 448. From "New Houses, New Clothes".

113 D H Lawrence, "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside", Phoenix, p 138.

114 D H Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover (1928)

115 D H Lawrence, from "The Root of Our Evil", Lawrence, Complete Poems, p 483.

116 David Craig, The Real Foundations (1973), p 164.

117 As F R Leavis claims in D H Lawrence: Novelist (1955), p 149. See Craig, p 143.

118 Craig, Real Foundations, p 164.

119 Aldous Huxley, "Lawrence in Etruria", a review of Etruscan Places, Spectator, 4 November, 1932. Reprinted in H Coombes (ed), D H Lawrence: A Critical Anthology (1963), p 273.

120 Auden, The Dyer's Hand, p 288.

121 F R Leavis, " D H Lawrence and Professor Irving Babbitt", a review of The Letters of D H Lawrence, Scrutiny, Vol 1, No 3, December 1932. In D H Lawrence: A Critical Anthology, ed. H Coombes, p 280.

122 Lawrence, Poems, p 321. From "St Matthew".

123 Ibid, p 265. From "Manifesto".

124 Ibid, p 481. From "The Primal Passions".

125 Apocalypse (1931), p 223.

126 Lawrence, Poems, p 691.

127 Ibid, p 691.

128 Ibid, p 727.

129 Ibid, p 701.

130 Ibid, p 522. From "Being Alive".

131 Ibid, p 298. From "Bare Fig-Trees".

132 Ibid, p 336. From "Fish".

133 Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p 64.

134 Lawrence, Poems, p 34. From "The Wild Common".

135 Ibid, p 498.

136 Ibid, p 338. From "Fish".

137 Ibid, p 266. "Manifesto".

138 Blackmur, p 299.

139 Lawrence, Poems, p 326.

140 Ibid, pp 366-7.

141 The Rainbow, p 448.

142 Lawrence, Poems, p 277.

143 Harry T Moore(ed), The Collected Letters of D H Lawrence, Vol I (1962), p 180.

144 Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p 6.

145 Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover Phoenix, ed. 1968, p.38.

146 Lawrence, The Rainbow, p 437.

147 Lawrence, Poems, p 523.

148 Ibid, p 524. "Relativity".

149 Ibid, p 379. "Fish".

150 Lawrence, Women in Love, pp 377-8.

151 Lawrence, Poems, p 347.

152 Ibid, p 466.

153 Ibid, pp 352-4.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1 Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (1957) entitles two of his chapters, "Landscape with Figures - a Setting" and "The 'Real' World of People".

2 W H Auden, Collected Longer Poems (1968).

3 Hoggart reporting a remark of Louis MacNeice in Auden, an Introductory Essay (1951), p 24.

4 Richard Hoggart, "Introduction to Auden's Poetry", in Auden, a Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Monroe K Spears (NJ, 1964), p 106.

5 Hoggart, Auden, an Introductory Essay, p 25.

6 Larkin, Whitsun, p 34.

7 Ibid, p 9. From "Here".

8 Ibid, p 21. From "The Whitsun Weddings".

9 Compare Larkin's interest in personal, faded memories - photos in "Lines On A Young Lady's Photograph Album", the "old programmes, a school prize or two,/packets of letters tied with tartan ribbons" conjured up by "Maiden Name", the old records and sheet music of "Reference Book" and "Love Songs in Age". The first two poems are in The Less Deceived (1955), the last two in The Whitsun Weddings (1964).

10 Larkin, Whitsun, p 9.

11 Ibid, p 28.

12 A Alvarez (ed), The New Poetry (1962), p 29.

13 Larkin, High Windows (1974), p 21.

14 e.g. Colin Falck, "Philip Larkin", in The Modern Poet: Essays from the Review, ed. by Ian Hamilton (1968), pp 101-110.

15 Larkin, Windows, p 29.

16 Larkin, Whitsun, p 20.

17 Larkin, Windows, p 17.

18 All in Whitsun.

19 See above, p - 78

20 Davie, Thomas Hardy, pp 64-66.

21 Larkin, Deceived, pp 28-29.

22 Davie, Thomas Hardy, p 64.

23 W H Auden, Collected Shorter Poems (1966), pp 255-268.

24 Ibid, pp 238-241.

25 P J Kavanagh, Edward Thomas in Heaven (1974), pp 18-21.

26 Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, p 48.

27 Ted Walker, The Night Bathers (1970), p 29. From "Grass".

28 Ted Walker, Gloves to the Hangman (1973), p 45.

29 In a BBC interview with Eric Mottram, which was never broadcast, Ginsberg commented: "I am expressing a level of my consciousness which is the kind of thing I talk about with my best friends, except that I'm doing it publicly. It's the same things they talk about with their best friends, except that they don't get a chance to do it publicly, in America or in Czechoslovakia". Quoted by M Horovitz, New Departures Nos 7/8 and 10/11 (1975), p vi.

30 See Nathaniel Tarn's remarks in British Poetry Since 1945, ed. E Lucie-Smith (1970), pp 396-9 reprinted from "World Wide Open", International Times (28 June-11 July 1968).

31 "The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is not the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history. In short, in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there."
Roland Barthes, Mythologies (Paris, 1957), 2nd English ed. trans by Annette Lavers, 1973, p 11.

32 The Arden, Osborne, Wesker, Delaney, Behan, Littlewood generation has been succeeded by John McGrath, Edward Bond, David Edgar, Howard Brenton, David Hare et al. We have also seen many excellent small companies thriving in the '70's - groups like 7:84, Belts & Braces, Red Ladder, Hull Truck, Joint Stock, etc.

33 Estimates vary between 5,000 and 7,000. See Horovitz's account in "Afterwards", Children of Albion, p 336 ff.

34 Timothy Leary, The Politics of Ecstasy (1970), p 294.

35 Doves for the Seventies ed. Peter Robins (1969), p 19. From "The Day Was A Bronze Harp".

36 Children of Albion, p 197.

37 Children of Albion, p 345.

38 Ibid, p 373.

39 "The British Poetry Revival 1960-1974", Modern British Poetry Conference Booklet for the Conference at PCL, ed. Chris Brookeman (Polytechnic of Central London, 1974)

40 New Departures 7/8 and 10/11, p ix.

41 Ibid, p 11.

42 MacDiarmid's fertile suggestion that "any utterance that is not pure/Propaganda is impure propaganda for sure!" ("Poetry and Propaganda") still does not justify the slogan - poetry he sometimes defiantly produced.

43 Barry MacSweeney, "An enthusiasm ... concerning Chris Torrance", Poetry Information 9/10, Spring 1974, p 34.

44 Iain Sinclair, "A Fly-sheet Homage for Chris Torrance", Poetry Information, 14, Autumn/Winter 1975/6, pp 19,20.

45 Chris Torrance, The Magic Door, Bk I (Albion Village Press, 1975). Unpaged.

46 From "0800 Monday 11 March, 1974" in The Magic Door.

47 From Torrance, Citrinas, The Magic Door, Bk II (Albion Village Press, 1977). Unpaged.

48 From "The Rubedo", in The Magic Door.

49 In Torrance, Citrinas.

50 Torrance, The Magic Door. From "O Spirit of my Mother!"

51 Torrance, Green Orange Purple Red.

52 Torrance, Green Orange Purple Red. No vii of "Bread and Wine".

53 Torrance, The Magic Door.

54 Torrance, Citrinas.

55 Torrance, The Magic Door.

56 Torrance, Citrinas. From "Maen Madoc".

57 Ibid, from "Terrain".

58 Eric Mottram, "Inheritance, Landscape, Location: Data for British Poetry 1977", PCL British Poetry Conference Booklet, ed. Paul Evans, (PCL, 1977), p 99.

59 Ibid, p 87.

60 For an élitist compromise on this question, see E M Forster's argument against Mr Bumble, the demanding local official who knows nothing of art, in "The Duty of Society to the Artist", Two Cheers for Democracy (1951), Penguin, 1965, pp 103-107.

61 Torrance, Green Orange Purple Red, p 11.

62 Ibid, p 31.

63 Ibid, p 33.

64 Ibid, p 10.

65 Ibid, pp 28-29.

66 Torrance, The Magic Door, unpaged.

67 Ibid.

68 Compare Ted Hughes's recent "shepherd poems". Though at readings he will talk "of doing some farming", the problem of the gentleman farmer's role does not arise in his poetry: the focus is very decidedly elsewhere - usually in the actual experience of the creatures. These poems have now been collected in Moortown (1979).

69 Torrance, The Magic Door.

70 It is, of course, more of a Georgian anti-pastoral than pastoral ("Val unscrewed the blocked tap/and found a dead frog in it"). The poem "Retreat" from Citrinas gives, perhaps, the best impression of their life.

71 "Poetry is seeking to make not meaning, but beauty, or if you insist on misusing words, its meaning is of another kind, and lies in relation the one another of lines and patterns of sound, perhaps harmonious, perhaps contrasting and clashing which the hearer feels rather than understands; lines drawn in air which stir deep emotions

which have not even a name in prose", Basil Bunting, note with the "Stream" recording of Briggflatts.

72 Basil Bunting, "Briggflatts" in Collected Poems (1968), p 51. The poem was first published separately: Briggflatts (1966).

73 Geoffrey Hill, Mercian Hymns (1971), p I. The book is not paged throughout; only the poems (pp I-XXX) are paged.

74 Anthony Thwaite, Poetry Today 1960-1973 (Harlow, Essex, 1973), p 65.

75 W E Parkinson, "Poetry in the North East", British Poetry Since 1960: a critical survey, ed. Michael Schmidt and Grevel Lindop (1972), p 111.

76 Bunting, Collected Poems, p 100. "Gin the Goodwife Stint", 1930.

77 Gael Turnbull, in "An Arlespenny" (Tarasque Press, Nottingham, 1965), says he re-reads Bunting for "the conviction of direct knowledge of physical experience" - quoted in Lucie-Smith, British Poetry Since 1945, p 387.

78 "History is now in England" in Eliot, and in Briggflatts there is the very strong motif of "Then Is Now".

79 T S Eliot, Four Quartets (1944). Faber ed. 1959, p 24.

80 Bunting, Collected Poems, p 52.

81 Ibid, p 70.

82 See Charles Marowitz, "A Lear Log". In C. Marowitz and S. Trussler, Theatre at Work (1967)

83 Bunting, Collected Poems, p 52.

84 Ibid, p 56.

85 Ibid, p 53.

86 "Basil Bunting: two interviews with Paul Johnstone", meantime, No 1, April 1977, p 73. For a more recent interview with Bunting, see Eric Mottram's "Conversation with Basil Bunting on the occasion of his 75th birthday, 1975", Poetry Information, no 19, Autumn 1978, Basil Bunting Special Issue, pp 3-10.

87 Loaded with mail of linked lies,
what weapon can the king lift to fight
when chance-met enemies employ sly
sword and shoulder-piercing pike,
pressed into the mire,
trampled and hewn till a knife
- in whose hand? - severs tight
neck cords? Axe rusts. Spine
picked bare by ravens, agile
maggots devour the slack side

and inert brain, never wise.
What witnesses he had life,
ravelled and worn past splice,
yarns falling to staple? Rime
on the bent, the beck ice,
there will be nothing on Stainmore to hide
void, no sable to disguise
what he wore under the lies,
king of Orkney, king of Dublin, twice
king of York, where the tide
stopped till long flight
from who knows what smile,
scowl, disgust or delight
ended in bale on the fellside.

Bunting, Collected Poems, pp 58-59.

88 Loc cit.

89 Loc cit.

90 Ibid, p 65.

91 Loc cit.

92 Ibid, p 55.

93 Ibid, p 66.

94 Ibid, p 69.

95 Hill, Mercian Hymns, first (unnumbered) page of "Acknowledgements".

96 Ibid, p IV.

97 Ibid, p V.

98 Ibid, p XI.

99 Ibid, p XII.

100 Loc cit.

101 It is not, perhaps, coincidental that that most English book The Wind in the Willows (1908) by Kenneth Grahame (which, at one level, is very concerned about British solidarity in a time of upheavals in the class structure) has a section closely paralleling Hill's mole and badger - populated underground Roman ruins, "the long-unlooked-for mansions of our tribe". (p IV.) In The Wind in the Willows, the Wild Wood plays city to the river's pastoral. As Badger, who lives there in social isolation says, it is populated "with all the usual lot, good, bad, and indifferent ... It takes all sorts to make a world ... we must live and let live". When Badger shows Mole the extent of his house, Mole is "staggered at the size, the

extent, the ramifications of it all; at the length of the dim passages, the solid vaultings of the crammed stove-chambers, the masonry everywhere, the pillars, the arches, the pavements". Badger explains that a long time ago "there was a city - a city of people, you know", but that in time the people moved on and the forest swallowed up the ruins. The badgers, there before the city, returned - "we are an enduring lot, and we may move out for a time, but we wait, and are patient, and back we come. And so it will ever be". (Quotations from 101 St.ed., 1951, pp 95-8). The Wind in the Willows, like other English children's classics of the period, does not try to disguise its feelings: like Betjeman, whose position is somewhat ludicrous 70 years later, Grahame loves the secure and privileged inequality - not that either consciously wishes suffering on anyone.

102 Hill, Mercian Hymns, p VII.

103 Ibid, p IX.

104 Ibid, p XIV.

105 Ibid, p V.

106 Ibid, p XXVIII.

107 Ibid, p XXIII.

108 Ibid, p XXV.

109 Ibid, p XXIX.

110 Ibid, p XXX.

111 Ibid, p XXII.

112 Jon Silkin, "The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill", British Poetry Since 1960, ed. Schmidt and Lindop, 1972.

113 Hill, Mercian Hymns, p XX.

114 Ibid, p XXI.

115 "Socialist Nature", Douglas Dunn, The New Review, Vol I, No 6, September 1974, p 61.

116 Donald Davie, Essex Poems, (1969).

117 Terry Eagleton, "Myth and History in Recent Poetry", British Poetry Since 1960, ed. Michael Schmidt and Grevel Lindop, 1972, p 234.

118 Ibid, p 235.

119 Ibid, p 236.

120 Ibid, p 238.

121 Seamus Heaney, Death of a Naturalist (1966), pp 15-16.

122 Ibid, p 37. From "Turkeys Observed".

123 Ibid, pp 15-16.

124 Referring to his sequence of prose-poems, Heaney described the early versions as "attempts to touch what Wordsworth called 'spots of time', moments at the very edge of consciousness which had lain for years in the unconscious as active lodes of nodes ..." See Stations (Belfast, 1975), p 3; while the first epigraph to "Singing School" in North (1975), in which the poet's role in modern Ireland is discussed through vivid, autobiographical pieces, is from 'The Prelude':

Fair seedtime had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear;
Much favoured in my birthplace, and no less
In that beloved Vale to which, erelong,
I was transplanted ...

125 See Heaney, Seamus Heaney (1977), p 9, the amplified script of a Danish radio programme broadcast on November 22nd 1971, published by Skoleradioen, Danmarks Radio, Copenhagen, 1977. This booklet also collects a number of comments first published by Heaney in The Listener, The Guardian and The Irish Times.

126 Heaney, Naturalist, pp 13-14.

127 In the same publication, see also p 40:
The bog is as much an emotional as it is an economic resource. It is Jungian ground, preserving layer upon layer of our history, a kind of geological memory-bank.

128 Ibid, p 10.

129 Heaney, Seamus Heaney, p 46, first published in The Guardian, 2 November 1974.

130 Heaney, North, p 36.

131 Ibid, p 38. See also comments in Heaney, Seamus Heaney, pp 11-12.

132 Heaney, North, p 38.

133 Heaney, North, pp 57-60.

134 See his comments in Seamus Heaney, p 47.

135 See also these passages from Seamus Heaney:
"My emotions, my feelings, whatever those instinctive energies are that have to be engaged for a poem, those energies quickened more when contemplating a victim, strangely, from 2,000 years ago than they did from contemplating a man at the end of a road being swept up into a plastic bag - I mean the barman at the end of our rœd tried to carry out a bomb and it blew up." (p 60) He goes on to explain the inertness of words before immediate horror and pity and to weigh up the effects of 'the troubles' on his work: "...when this thing came along, the poets in some way were expected to reflect what they thought about it in their poetry. There was a kind of pressure on them to reveal the roots of the conflict, a simple-minded pressure also to speak up for their own side, as it were. And it has forced every one of them, myself included, to quest closely and honestly into the roots of one's own sense of oneself, into the tribal dirt that lies around the roots of all of us. It has forced us to look back, and it has also forced us to do something even rarer - to look forward and say not somuch 'Who am I, who was I? but 'who really do I want to be, what kind of man do I want to be?'" (p 60)

136 Heaney, North, p 73.

137 Heaney, Wintering Out, (1972), pp 68-72

138 Ibid, p 41. From No 3, "Stump", in the sequence "A Northern Hoard".

139 Heaney, North, pp 62-73.

140 Seamus Heaney, Field Work (1979), pp 61-64.

141 Charles Tomlinson, "May", New Statesman, Vol 99, No 2557, 21 March 1980, p 422.

142 Like Timpanaro, Silkin anticipates "a time when the state will wither away". He also sees that: "Man is a part of Nature and to isolate one from the other, or to slide the one over the other, is to miss either the (related) complexity of both or the 'solidity' of each". Jon Silkin, Nature With Man (1965), p 56.

143 Ibid, p 54.

144 Jon Silkin, The Peaceable Kingdom (1954), Rep. in The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse, ed. Kenneth Allott (Harmondsworth, 1950), 2nd ed, 1962, p 383.

145 Silkin, Nature with Man (1965), p 54.

146 Ted Hughes, Lupercal (1960), p 58.

147 Silkin, Nature With Man, p 38.

148 F R Leavis "Hugh MacDiarmid - Second Hymn to Lenin", Scrutiny, Vol IV, December 1935, p 305.

149 From "The Second Hymn to Lenin" in The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid, 2 vols, ed. Michael Grieve and W R Aitken (1978), p 323.

150 Ibid, p 357, from "The Oon Olympian".

151 Ibid, p 454.

152 See, for example, the very amusing opening to the essay "Major Douglas and Social Credit; John Maclean and the Clydesiders", The Company I've Kept (1966), p 104 ff, or passages from "The Snares of Varuna" (such as "Genius is becoming rarer ... Culture is slowly declining, etc") or almost any page from In Memoriam James Joyce - or consider the lack of fraternity in "Hostings of Heroes", Complete Poems, pp 692-3 or "In the Gangs" (Ibid, p 1325). Compare the latter with Tom McGrath's recent play, The Hard Man (1977)

153 Lucky Poet, xxxii, p 153.

154 See "Reflections in a Slum", Complete Poems, p 1058.

155 Ibid, p 1158. From "Talking with Five Thousand People in Edinburgh".

156 Kenneth Buthlay, Hugh MacDiarmid (1964), p 45 quotes from Gregory Smith, Scottish Literature: Character and Influence (1919) who discusses the Scottish habit of jostling together the real and the fantastic as 'the Caledonian Antisyzygy'.

157 Ibid, p 64. From "Scunner".

158 Ibid, p 23. From "Au Clair de la Lune".

159 Ibid, p 17.

160 Talking of Hardy, MacDiarmid's "The Storm-Cock's Song" is clearly indebted to "The Darkling Thrush".

161 Ibid, p 798. From In Memoriam James Joyce; hereafter abbreviated as IMJJ.

162 MacDiarmid, The Company I've Kept, pp 173-174.

163 Complete Poems, p 541.

164 Ibid, p 541.

165 Ibid, p 1089.

166 Ibid, p 757. From IMJJ.

167 Ibid, p 832. From "The World of Words", in IMJJ.

168 Ibid, p 844. From "The Snares of Varuna".

169 Ibid, p 763. From IMJJ.

170 Ibid, pp 830-831. From "The World of Words" in IMJJ.

171 David Craig, The Real Foundations, p 247.

172 Complete Poems, pp 535, 1057, 354.

173 Ibid, p 771. From IMJJ.

174 See above p.240 ff where Hopkins is discussed in a similar way.

175 Complete Poems, p 1054.

176 Ibid, p 756. From IMJJ.

177 Ibid, pp 119-122.

178 Ibid, pp 422-433.

179 Ibid, pp 821-822.

180 Ibid, p 430.

181 Ibid, p 431.

182 Ibid, p 423.

183 For example: fruit of the forbidden tree, Christophanic rock that moved, bread from stones, Faith moving mountains, Alpha and Omega, we of little faith, Goliath, not built on a rock, the beginning and the end, stones would move, the resurrection, stone rolled away from the tomb of the Lord, came forth. In addition, there are less direct references such as those to the pillars of Creation (Job) and broken images (2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Ezekial).

184 Ibid, p 432.

185 Loc cit.

186 Loc cit.

187 Ibid, p 427.

188 Ibid, p 423.

189 Ibid, p 428.

190 Ibid, p 433.

191 Ibid, p 426.

192 Loc. cit.

193 Ibid, p 431.

194 Ibid, p 425.

195 Ibid, pp 432-433.

196 Ibid, pp 429, 431.

197 Ibid, p 431.

198 Friedrich Engels, "Introduction" to the English edition of Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, published in 1892. In Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Basics Writings on Politics and Philosophy ed. Lewis S Feuer (New York, 1959), p 50.

199 Ibid, p 52.

200 Edward Thomas's "Lad's Love" demonstrates this very strikingly, though MacDiarmid's own lyric "The Watergaw" works in a similar way.

201 MacDiarmid, Complete Poems, p 430.

202 Ibid, p 426.

203 Loc cit.

204 Ibid, p 427.

205 Ibid, p 425.

206 Ibid, pp 426-427.

207 Ibid, pp 427, 429.

208 Ibid, p 428.

209 Ibid, p 429.

210 Ibid, p 426.

211 Ibid, p 326.

212 Ibid, p 428.

213 Ibid, p 429.

214 Ibid, p 423.

215 Ibid, p 558. From "Poetry and Propaganda".

216 Ibid, p 1084.

217 Ibid, p 1044.

218 Ibid, p 1144.

PAGE NUMBERING AS ORIGINAL

NOTES - CHAPTER V

1 "God moves the world as the beloved object moves the lover", Metaphysics, ix, 7.
Aristotle refers to God as pure energy, Metaphysics, xii. 8.

2 Ted Hughes's phrase in "Ted Hughes and Crow", an interview with Egbert Faas, London Magazine, January, 1971.

3 Williams, Politics and Letters, p 130.

4 Loc cit.

5 The Myth of God Incarnate, ed. John Hick (1977), p 145.

6 "Ted Hughes and Crow", an interview with Egbert Faas, London Magazine, January 1971, p 16.

7 Myth, p ix.

8 Ibid, p 146.

9 Ibid, p 205.

10 In his The Life of Jesus Critically Examined (1845), SCM Press 1973, p 53, D F Strauss's third kind of myth (in addition to historical and philosophical) was poetical: "...historical and philosophical mythi partly blended together, and partly embellished by the creations of the imagination, in which the original fact or idea is almost obscured by the veil which the fancy of the poet has woven around it".

11 Marx, ed. McLellan, p 164. From The German Ideology.

12 Ibid, p 50. From "On the Jewish Question".

13 Ibid, p 157.

14 Ibid, p 442. From Capital.

15 Shakespeare, Macbeth, V, iii, 45.

16 "Neurosis is an inner cleavage - the state of being at war with oneself", Carl Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (1933). Trans. W S Dell and Cary F Baynes, 1961, p 273. All quotations from this edition.

17 Ibid, p 81.

18 Ibid, p 231.

19 Ibid, p 230.

20 Ibid, p 233.

21 Ibid, pp 237-238.

22 Ibid, p 234.

23 Ibid, p 188.

24 Ibid, pp 191-192.

25 Ibid, p 227.

26 Ibid, p 197.

27 Ibid, p 198.

28 Edwin Muir, Collected Poems, (1960), p

29 Peter Marinelli, Pastoral (1971) noted "the country pastoral of childhood" in Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward Angel, Richard Llewellyn's How Green Was My Valley and Laurie Lee's Cider with Rosie.

30 See R B Kershner, Dylan Thomas (Chicago, 1976), pp 24 and 25 for comments on Thomas as a "cultural phenomenon". On his death, "even the staid London Times ran an obituary five times longer than its usual allotment to literary figures" and "His recordings outsell all others worldwide, with Robert Frost a poor second. By 1962, according to Louise Murdy (Sound and Sense in Dylan Thomas's Poetry, 1966, p 14), the US public had bought 400,000 copies of Thomas's recordings".

31 Kershner's chapter "The Religious Poet", Ibid, pp 66-101, discusses the work of over sixty critics who have considered Thomas in this way. Not surprisingly, "religious" receives very varied interpretation.

32 Ibid, p 67.

33 W S Merwin, 'The Religious Poet' in Dylan Thomas: the Legend and the Poet, ed. E W Tedlock (1960). Mercury, 1963, p 236.

34 Dylan Thomas, Collected Poems, (1952)

35 Stuart Holroyd, "Dylan Thomas and the Religion of the Instinctive Life", A Casebook on Dylan Thomas, ed. J Brinnin (New York, 1960), p 144.

36 Thomas, The Poems ed. Daniel Jones (1971), p.77.

37 G S Fraser, The Modern Writer and His World (1953), revised ed. 1964, p 335.

38 Ted Hughes, Crow (1970). From "Crow Hears Fate" in the 2nd ed., 1972

39 Crow, p.67

40 Gerard Manley Hopkins, The Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W H Gardner, (Penguin, 1953), p 27. From "The Starlight Night". All quotations are from this edition.

41 Ibid, p 59.

42 The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Christopher Devlin (1959), p 123.

43 Hopkins, Poems, p 51.

44 The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W H Gardnor and N H Mackenzie (1948, 4th ed, revised 1967), p xxi.

45 Terry Eagleton, "Nature and the Fall in Hopkins: a reading of 'God's Grandeur", Essays in Criticism, Vol XXIII, January 1973, No 1, p 74.

46 Hopkins, Poems, p 30. From "Pied Beauty".

47 Austin Warren, "Instress of Inscape" in Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Symposium by the Kenyon Critics, ed. Cleanth Brooks (1975), p 88.

48 Thomas Blackburn, "Hyperaesthesia Was His Faithful Wife", Brooks (ed) Symposium, p vii.

49 Samuel Beckett, Malone Dies (1951). Penguin, 1962, p 9.

50 Ibid, pp 56-57.

51 Hopkins, Poems, p 29.

52 The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Humphrey House and Graham Storey (1959), p 254.

53 Donald McChesney, A Hopkins Commentary (1968), p 146.

54 Hopkins, Poems, p 65.

55 Ibid, p 64.

56 The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges, ed. C C Abbott (1935), 2nd ed., 1955, pp 272-274.

57 Hopkins, Poems, p 64.

58 Ibid, pp 64-65.

59 Ibid, p 63.

60 Letters, I, cxliii.

61 Ibid, p lix.

62 Brooks (ed), Symposium, p 32.

63 Leavis, New Bearings, p 139.

64 Ibid, p 138.

65 Hopkins, Poems, p 63.

66 Ibid, p 61.

67 Ibid, p 62.

68 A secular counterpart to these poems is the fine lyric "Spring and Fall" (p 50).

69 F R Leavis, "Metaphysical Isolation", in Brooks (ed), Symposium, p 121.

70 Hopkins, Poems, p 29. From "The Sea and the Skylark".

71 Ibid, p 61.

72 Ibid, p 60. From "Carrion Comfort".

73 Ibid, p 50.

74 "R S Thomas: Priest and Poet", a transcript of John Ormond's film for BBC Television, broadcast on 2 April 1972, introduced by Sam Adams, Poetry Wales, Spring 1972, Vol 7, No 4, pp 53-54.

75 Ibid, p 55.

76 R S Thomas, An Acre of Land (Montgomery Printing Company, Newtown, 1952), p 70.

77 "I'm a solitary, I'm a nature mystic", Ormond, Poetry Wales, p 51.

78 The same comparison is made in "At It", in Frequencies (1978), p 15.

79 R S Thomas, Selected Poems 1946-1963 (1973), p 97. Where poems are collected in Selected Poems, references are to that text.

80 Ibid, p 119. From "Kneeling".

81 Ibid, p 4. From "Night and Morning".

82 Ibid, p 43. From "No Through Road".

83 R S Thomas, Song at the Year's Turning (1955), p 12.

84 The Bible (Authorised Version, 1611). St. Matthew, xiii, 57 and St. John i, 11, respectively.

85 Ibid, p 29.

86 Loc cit.

87 Thomas, Selected Poems, p 12. Originally in Song.

88 See Dick Hebdige, Subculture: the Meaning of Style (1979), Stuart Hall, Policing the Crisis (1978), Leonard E Barrett, The Rastafarians (1977), etc. Or, compare popular notions of the 1976/1977 phenomenon of "punk" with the social and artistic reality: see Hebdige (op cit) and Fred and Judy Vermorel, The Sex Pistols (1978).

89 Thomas, Song, p 30. From "A Priest to his People".

90 Ibid, p 25. From "Affinity".

91 Loc cit.

92 Ibid, p 55. From "The Hill Forever Speaks".

93 Ibid, p 17.

94 Ibid, p 67.

95 Ibid, p 64. Also in Selected Poems, p 10.

96 Ibid, p 113.

97 See also "Valediction". Ibid, p 65.

98 Ibid, p 73.

99 Ibid, p 99.

100 Ibid, p 108.

101 Ibid, p 68.

102 Ibid, p 45.

103 Ibid, pp 54, 55 and 36 respectively.

104 Ibid, p 37.

105 Ibid, p 40.

106 Ibid, p 41.

107 Ibid, p 38.

108 Loc cit.

109 Thomas, Selected Poems, p 22.

110 Ibid, p 29.

111 Ibid, p 31.

112 Ibid, p 18.

113 Loc cit.

114 Ibid, p 24.

115 Ibid, p 13.

116 Ibid, p 14.

117 Ibid, p 12.

118 Ibid, p 31.

119 Ibid, p 32.

120 Ibid, p 13.

121 Ibid, p 31.

122 Ibid, p 19.

123 Ibid, p 31.

124 See "Resort" in Not That He Brought Flowers, which concludes with a bitter question about the tourists - "Did they expect/The sea, too, to be bi-lingual?" (p 23) or "Welcome to Wales" in the same volume, or think of the "Elsan culture" in "Looking At Sheep" (The Bread of Truth).

125 Thomas, The Bread of Truth (1963), p 41.

126 Thomas, Poetry for Supper (1958), p 36.

127 Thomas, Tares (1961), p 25.

128 Thomas, Bread, p 18.

129 Ibid, p 27.

130 Thomas, Selected Poems, p 51.

131 Ibid, p 97.

132 Ibid, p 93.

133 Ibid, p 104.

134 Ibid, p 53.

135 Thomas, Not That He Brought Flowers, p 11.

136 R S Thomas, Pietà (1966), p 12.

137 Thomas, Selected Poems, p 84.

138 Thomas, The Bread of Truth, p 9. From "Welsh Border".

139 R S Thomas, Frequencies (1978), p 12.

140 Critics of Hughes, of course, see Thomas's orthodoxy and restraint as a virtue:

> Aware of man's weakness R S Thomas re-casts for our own time the myth of nature, in contemporary terms yet without that indulgence of violence the poetry of Ted Hughes sometimes suggests. Indeed the wounded souls and animals that cross R S Thomas's landscapes, moving as they do in a natural world realistically presented and where violence is recorded rather than exploited or exaggerated, evoke the need of a compassion nature cannot offer.

John Ackerman, "Man and Nature in the Poetry of R S Thomas", Poetry Wales, Spring 1972, Vol 7, No 4, p 19.

Which poet, it is fair to reply, is nearer to the Shakespeare of King Lear?

141 Or, in John Mole's words, "we have moved, as it were, from the parish ... into the galaxy". "On the Recent Poetry of R S Thomas", New Poetry, 43, p 7.

142 R S Thomas, H'm (1972), p 1.

143 Loc cit.

144 Ibid, p 21.

145 Ibid, p 16. From " ViaNegativa". See also "Adjustments"in Frequencies (1978), p 29.

146 Thomas, H'm, p 26.

147 Ibid, p 7.

148 R S Thomas, The Way of It (Ceolfrith Press, 1977), p 19.

149 Ibid, p 20.

150 Selected Poems by Edward Thomas, ed. R S Thomas (1964), p 14.

151 Thomas, H'm, p 22.

152 Ibid, p 25. From "The Times".

153 R S Thomas, Laboratories of the Spirit (1975), p 2.

154 "Ted Hughes and Crow", an interview with Egbert Faas, London Magazine, January 1971, p 16.

155 A E Dyson, "The Poetry of R S Thomas", The Critical Quarterly, Vol 20, No 2, Summer 1978, p 28.

156 Ibid, p 29.

157 Ibid, p 30.

158 Thomas, Laboratories, p 5.

159 Dyson, "R S Thomas", p 30.

160 I would not, however, go so far as Calvin Bedient: "With the exception of 'Green Categories', which brings Kant and a peasant together, Thomas never really challenges the mind". Eight Contemporary Poets (1974), p 52. Thomas's "Platonic" poems ("The Prisoner" in Laboratories is a good example as are "The Empty Church", "The Possession" and "The Film of God" in Frequencies), provide a set of imaginative variations on a traditional theme of philosophy.

161 Dyson sonorously refers to R S Thomas as "among the five or six greatest poets to have written in English in this century". Dyson, "R S Thomas", 21.

162 A M Allchin, "Emerging", Theology, Vol LXXXI, September 1978, No 683, p 352.

163 Thomas, Frequencies, p 52.

164 In "The Calling" (Laboratories), Thomas even threatens to return to the old sterility of his earlier "priest/people" poetry. In his Nationalist poetry in the '70's, however, there is a lively political dimension. Critics of Thomas's "poetics of despair" (see Dafydd Elis Thomas, "The Image of Wales in R S Thomas's Poetry", Poetry Wales, Spring 1972, Vol 7, No 4, p 66), have pointed out that his nationalism is historically motivated and turns rather pointlessly, like that of the early Yeats, to a mythical past of cultural strength.

165 Thomas, Laboratories, p 31.

166 Ibid, p 1.

167 Loc cit.

168 Thomas, Frequencies, p 42. From "Semi-detached".

169 Ibid, p 40.

170 Ibid, p 24.

171 Loc cit.

172 Ibid, p 48. From "Absence".

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1. From Wordsworth's own introductory note to "The Immortality Ode", in The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, intro. John Morley (1888), p.357.

2 Ted Hughes, Poetry in the Making (1967), pp 15-21.

3 Ibid, p 101.

4 Ted Hughes, The Hawk in the Rain (1957), p 40.

5 Hughes, "Context", a poets' forum, London Magazine, February 1962, Vol 1, No 11, p 44.

6 Loc cit.

7 Sagar.K, The Art of Ted Hughes (1975), p 35.

8 Bedient.C, Eight Contemporary Poets (1974), p 107.

9 Horder,John, "Desk Poet", The Guardian, 23 March 1965, p 9. In the "Author's Note" at the beginning of Wodwo (1967), Hughes talks of "a single adventure to which the poems are commentary and amplification", (p 9).

10 Bedient, Poets, p 108.

11 Bedient, Poets, p 113.

12 Bedient, Poets, p 114.

13 Hughes, Hawk, p 41.

14 In a recording made for Argo on 29 August 1962, Hughes said "I prefer poems that make an effect". (The Poet Speaks, No 5, Argo PLP 1085.)

15 Hughes, Hawk, p 59.

16 Ted Hughes, A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse (1971), p 11.

17 Loc cit.

18 Horder, "Desk Poet".

19 "Fallgrief's Girl-Friends", Hawk, p 28.

20 Hughes, Poetry in the Making, p 17.

21 Hughes, Hawk, p 15.

22 Ibid, p 40.

23 Ted Hughes, Lupercal (1960), p 23.

24 Hughes, "Context", p 44. Or, as Sylvia Plath wrote in the same edition of London Magazine, "surely the great use of poetry is its pleasure". She talks of the "sidelong" influence of the issues of our time on her poetry: "I am not gifted with the tongue of Jeremiah, though I may be sleepless enough before my vision of the apocalypse. My poems do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark. They are not about the terrors of mass extinction, but about the bleakness of the moon over a yew tree in a neighbouring graveyard. Not about the testaments of tortured Algerians, but about the night thoughts of a tired surgeon" (p 46).

25 Hughes, "Context", p 45.

26 Hamilton, Ian, A Poetry Chronicle (1973), p 166.

27 Davie, Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, p 64.

28 Hughes, Hawk, p 37.

29 Poetry Dimension I (1973), ed. Jeremy Robson, p 133.

30 Poetry Dimension Annual 5 (1978), ed. Danny Abse, p 59.

31 Hughes, Lupercal, pp 37-38.

32 R Fuller, The Listener, March 1971.

33 Ian Robinson and David Sims, "Ted Hughes's Crow", The Human World, No 9, November 1972, p 40.

34 Jon Silkin, Stand, Vol VI, 1963, p 7.

35 J D Hainsworth, "Ted Hughes and Violence", Essays in Criticism, vol. 15, 1965, p. 358.

36 At the Duke's Playhouse, Lancaster, 1 May 1978.

37 Hughes, Poetry in the Making, p 12.

38 For a description of this venture, see Carol Dix, "Poet's Corner", The Guardian, 13 May 1975.

39 Hughes, A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, pp 184-5.

40 Hughes, Lupercal, p 15.

41 Derwent May, "Ted Hughes" in The Survival of Poetry, ed. M Dodsworth (1970), p 144.

42 Calvin Bedient, Eight Contemporary Poets (1974), p 99.

43 Hughes, Hawk, p 57.

44 Osborne J, Look Back in Anger (1956).

45 Hughes, Lupercal, p 42.

46 Hughes, Hawk, p 45.

47 loc cit.

48 Folk tales about talking animals manage this feat too. Faith that common principles are at work in creation is naturally accompanied by a full, but totally unsentimental, respect for other forms of being.

49 Hughes, Wodwo (1967), p 18.

50 Hughes, Lupercal, p 14.

51 "Egg-Head", Hawk, pp 35-36.

52 Hughes, "Wings", Wodwo, pp 174-176.

53 See the stories in Wodwo or the poems "Sunstroke" and "Thrushes" in Lupercal or "Crow's Account of St George" in Crow.

54 Sagar, Art, p 6.

55 Conquest,R. (ed), New Lines (1956), p XV.

56 Davie, Thomas Hardy, pp 64-66.

57 Larkin, Whitsun Weddings, p 19.

58 Hughes, Lupercal, p 11.

59 Ibid, p 12.

60 Davie, Thomas Hardy, p 12.

61 P J Kavanagh, Edward Thomas in Heaven (1974),p 23.

62 Ibid, p 48.

63 Ibid, p 36.

64 Hughes, A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, p 13.

65 Hughes, "Introduction" to Vasko Popa's Selected Poetry, trans. A Pennington (1969), p 10.

66 loc cit.

67 A Alvarez (ed), The New Poetry (1962), p 28.

68 Ibid, p 25.

69 Plath, "Context", London Magazine, February 1962, p 46.

70 See, for example, lines 965-970 of Seneca's Oedipus:

> scrutatur avidus manibus uncis lumina,
> radice ab ima funditus vulsos simul
> evolvit orbes; haeret in vacuo manus
> et fixa penitus unguibus lacerat cavos
> alte recessus luminum et inanes sinus,
> saevitque frustra plusque quam satis est furit.

The Loeb translation of this is:

> With hooked fingers he greedily searches
> out his eyes and, torn from their very
> roots, he drags both eyeballs out;
> still stay his hands in the empty
> sockets and, deep fixed, tear with
> their nails the deep-set hollows of
> his eyes and empty cavities;
> vainly he rages, and with excessive
> fury raves. (F J Miller (ed),
> Seneca's Tragedies, 1917. pp 514-515.)

Hughes translates the passage thus:

> his fingers had stabbed deep into his
> eyesockets he hooked them gripping
> the eyeballs and he tugged
> twisting and dragging with all his
> strength till they gave way and
> he flung them from him his
> fingers dug back into his sockets
> he could not stop he was
> gibbering and moaning insane with
> his fury against himself gouging
> scrabbling with his nails.
> Ted Hughes (adapted), Seneca's Oedipus (1969), p 51.

71 I have over-simplified Hughes's thesis, which actually includes Tarquin and Lucrece too, making "four poles of energy". (A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, p 194.)

72 Ibid, p 198.

73 Quoted in Sagar, Art, p 8 . Recklings (1966) was published in a limited edition and I have not been able to consult it.

74 Ian Robinson and David Sims, "Ted Hughes's Crow", p 39.

75 Hughes, Poetry in the Making, p 110.

76 Ibid, pp 133-134.

77 Published in The Grapevine, University of Durham Institute of Education, February 1958.

78 Sagar, Art, p 7.

79 "Ted Hughes and Crow", an interview with Egbert Faas, London Magazine, January 1971, p 11.

80 Loc. cit.

81 Hughes, Lupercal, p 60.

82 Hughes, Lupercal, p 13.

83 Ibid, pp 61-63.

84 Ibid, p 13.

85 W S Merwin recorded the psychological counterpart of this imagery in his account of a dream Hughes had while he was an unhappy student of English Literature at Cambridge. A visitor, someone like Hughes himself, but with a fox's head, came in and laid a bloody paw on an unfinished essay, saying "you're killing us". (Sagar, Art, p 8.) Pure mental activity, denying the physical, is "making wolf-masks" and this takes place on the verge of madness, as "Crow's Account of St George" (Crow, p 26) makes plain.

86 Hughes, Lupercal, p 55.

87 Hughes, "Myth and Education", Children's Literature in Education, I, 1970, p 60.

88 See Hughes's explanation of his story, The Iron Man, in the same article.

89 Hughes, A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse, p 184.

90 Beckett S, Endgame (1958) Faber paperback ed. of trans. 1964, p.31

91 Hughes, Crow, p 65.

92 Hughes, Shakespeare's Verse, pp 184-185.

93 Hughes, "Myth and Education", p 69.

94 Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, p 206.

95 Hughes, Wodwo, p 60.

96 Ibid, p 173.

97 At the Duke's Playhouse, Lancaster, 1 May 1978. Many of these have been published in Moortown (1979).

98 "Any form of violence - any form of vehement activity - invokes the bigger energy, the elemental power circuit of the Universe." London Magazine, January 1971, p 9.

99 Hughes, Crow, p 53.

100 Crow's debt to cartoon techniques will be apparent to any reader, though David Lodge's article "Crow and the Cartoons", CQ, Vol 13, No 1, Spring 1971, is useful for its preliminary itemisation of this debt.

101 Hughes, Crow, pp 53-54.

102 Ibid, p 69.

103 Hughes, Shakespeare's Verse, p 11.

104 Smith A C H, Orghast at Persepolis (1972), p 45.

105 Faber and Faber gave me the following sales figures for some of Hughes's most successful volumes of poetry, in a private letter dated 7 August 1978:

Title	Total Sales Figures to June 1978
Crow (1971)	nearly 37,000
Gaudete (1977)	nearly 9,000
The Hawk in the Rain (paperback version only, 1968)	nearly 30,000
Selected Poems (paperback, 1972)	over 40,000
Wodwo (1967)	nearly 26,000

Faber and Faber also gave, in the same letter, this example of a "recent successful volume of poetry": Tom Paulin, State of Justice (1977); sales of over 3,000 copies.

106 At the Duke's Playhouse, Lancaster, May 1st 1978 he spoke of helping with the lambing season on a nearby farm and since then, at readings, he has spoken as a practising farmer.

107 J M Newton, "Wishes and Needs: The Art of Ted Hughes by Keith Sagar", The Cambridge Quarterly, Vol VI, No 4, p 372.

108 Hughes, "Context", p 45.

109 London Magazine, January 1971, p 17.

110 Ibid, p 15.

111 "Desk Poet", The Guardian, 23 March 1965.

112 "Orghast: talking without words", Vogue, December 1971. Quoted by Smith, Orghast at Persepolis, p 245.

113 At the Duke's Playhouse, Lancaster, May 1 1978, Hughes described "Pike" and other early animal and bird poems (written somewhat nostalgically in the US from memories of a South Yorkshire estate) as forming a kind of "tapestry of creatures". "Second Glance at a Jaguar" uses techniques similar to these poems.

114 "Second Glance at a Jaguar", Hughes has written, is "the sole representative among my poems of a kind of poem I like - it is a sketch, and I wrote it standing in front of the cage". Let the Poot Choose, ed. James Gibson (1973), p 87.

115 Hughes, Wodwo, p 183.

116 Hughes, Lancaster, May 1st 1978.

117 Hughes, "Ted Hughes's Crow", The Listener, 30 July 1970.

118 Raban J, The Society of the Poem (1971), p 40.

119 Robinson and Sims, The Human World, November 1972, p 35.

120 "Introduction to the poetry of Vasko Popa", Vasko Popa: Selected Poems, translated by Anne Pennington (1969), pp 11-12.

121 Hughes has described Crow as a kind of fairy-tale taking place in a world like "a great hotel" in which you can move from room to room but all takes place simultaneously. He has spoken of the poems as dealing, in the broadest sense, with male/female questions and of Crow bungling all his confrontations with the monstrous beings who block him. (Paraphrase of remarks made at Lancaster, May 1st 1978.)

122 This quotation from Cave Birds derives from the BBC broadcast.

123 Hughes, London Magazine, January 1971, p 17.

124 Ibid, p 7.

125 Smith, Orghast, p 47.

126 Ibid, p 45.

127 Ibid, p 43.

128 See f.n. 122.

129 Loc cit.

130 Hughes, Cave Birds (1978), p 60.

131 Ibid, p 62.

132 See f.n. 122. In the published version, Cave Birds, p 18, this historical frame of reference has been entirely removed.

133 Hughes, Cave Birds, p 10.

134 Broadcast version. See Cave Birds, p 30, for the revised, published version.

135 Hughes, Wodwo, p 177.

136 See Wodwo, p 18 and Lupercal, p 58.

137 See f.n. 50.

138 Hughes, Wodwo, p 163.

139 Hughes, Moortown, p 92.

140 Hughes, Wodwo, p 171.

141 J M Newton's review of Crow, "Some Notes on Crow by Ted Hughes", which is especially good on the brilliance and originality of Hughes's "crow music", in The Cambridge Quarterly, Summor/Autumn, 1971, Vol 5, No 4, pp 376-384, quotes some passages from Alan Watts, including the following (p 383):

> Every individual is an expression of the whole realm of nature, a unique action of the total universe. This fact is rarely, if ever, experienced by most individuals. Even those who know it to be true in theory do not sense or feel it, but continue to be aware of themsolves as isolated 'egos' inside bags of skin.
>
> (Watts A, The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are, 1964 and - in England - 1969)

This seems to describe the kind of guilt-free harmony so admired by Hughes in nature, though its connections with Zen mean, perhaps, that it is more a case of "parallel evolution".

142 Hughes, Cave Birds, p 56.

143 "The poem we are told was originally intended as a film scenario." Oliver Lyne, "The Lecherous Reverend Lumb", TLS, 1 July 1977, p 800. Lyne notes some of Gaudete's indebtedness to film: almost any page of the book would increase his list of debts.

144 Sagar, Art, p 114.

145 Hughes, Crow, p 79.

146 Though this mood is more often associated with Sylvia Plath, it is also recurrently present in Wodwo as well as in the Epilogue to Gaudete.

147 Poetry Book Society Bulletin, no 15, September 1957.

148 Hughes, Gaudete, p 181.

149 Hughes, Children's Literature in Education, I, 1970, p 65.

150 The opening quotation from Parzival, "these two, however, were one, for 'my brother and I' is one body", Gaudete, p 8, Lumb's realisation that "this other is himself", p 16 and later "that his antagonist is his own double", p 81, all mark this unity of being.

151 Hughes, Gaudete, p 163.

152 Loc cit.

153 In Lupercal (p 47) the otter could "take stolen hold/On a bitch otter in a field full/Of nervous horses, but lingers nowhere./Yanked above hounds, reverts to nothing at all,/To this long pelt over the back of a chair".

154 Comment in the programme note to the platform reading of selections from Gaudete that took place in the National Theatre, London, on 18 July 1977.

155 Hughes, Gaudete, p 49.

156 "... I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality." Wordsworth, Complete Poetical Works, p 358.

157 Hughes, Gaudete, p 53.

158 Ibid, pp 168-169.

159 Ibid, p 166.

160 Ibid, p 167.

161 Ibid, p 161.

162 Ibid, p 35.

163 Ibid, p 23.

164 Ibid, p 71.

165 Ibid, p 41.

166 Loc cit.

167 Ibid, p 44.

168 Ibid, p 46.

169 Ibid, p 110.

170 Ibid, pp 23-24.

171 Loc cit.

172 Ibid, p 34.

173 Ibid, p 167.

174 Ibid, p 86.

175 Ibid, p 113.

176 Ibid, p 127.

177 J M Newton has written: "The metaphysical apprehension that most often recurs in the poems, in ever new and differing ways, is - crudely - that each different centre of life is the spatial and temporal centre of all life, of the universe", "Ted Hughes's Metaphysical Poems", The Cambridge Quarterly, Autumn 1967, Vol II, No 4, p 398.

178 From "A March Calf", Season Songs, pp 13-14.

179 Hughes, Wodwo, pp 179-181.

180 Hughes, London Magazine, January 1971, p 10.

181 Ibid, p 9.

182 "Introduction" to János Pilinszky. Selected Poems, translated by Ted Hughes (1976), p 11. In "Under the Winter Sky" (p 19), Pilinszky wrote:

> I shall not deceive myself any longer.
> There is nobody to help me.
> Suffering cannot redeem me.
> No god will protect me.
>
> Nothing could be more simple than this
> or more horrible.
> The biblical monsters
> start slowly towards me.

183 David Holbrook, "Lost Bearings in English Poetry" in The Black Rainbow, ed. Peter Abbs (1974), p 135. Holbrook's most blatant injustice to Hughes is in his reading of Gog as a hero: as we have seen, this is the opposite of Hughes's stated views and certainly it cannot be deduced from the poem itself.

184 Hughes, Poetry in the Making, p 124.

185 Hughes, Crow, p 45.

186 Ted Hughes, Moon-Bells (1978)

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1 Williams, "Ideas of Nature", Problems in Materialism and Culture, pp 83, 84. First published in Ecology: the Shaping Enquiry, ed. J Benthall (1972).

2 Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry (1969). Pelican ed. 1972, p 312.

3 Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing", trans. J Lehure, in Yale French Studies, No 48, 1975, p 111.

4 R. S. Thomas, Frequencies (1978), p.48.

5 E. P. Thompson, Protest and Survive (1980) p.28

6 Hughes, Remains of Elmet (1979) p.20.

7 Ibid., pp. 70-71.

8 Ibid., pp. 124-125.

9 One area of Williams's work which might be further developed is suggested in "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" (Problems in Materialism and Culture (1980), pp.40-42), when Williams characterises residual and emergent forms of culture. There seem to be possibilities here for a sharpening of the notion of "structure of feeling".

10 M. D. Shipman, The Limitations of Social Research (1972), pp. 163-164.

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